

SALMAN RUSHDIE
NAYANTARA SAHGAL
SHASHI THAROOR
ARUN JOSHI
MANOHAR MALGONKAR
O. V. VIJAYAN
ROHINTON MISTRY
RAJ GILL
RAHI MASOOM RAJA
NIRMAL VARMA
KAMALESHWAR



Indira Gandhi & The Emergency as Viewed in the Indian Novel

O. P. MATHUR

The present book is unique insofar as it deals with an important subject practically ignored by critics of Indian fiction. Prof. O.P. Mathur, a scholar of eminence, who has written a number of books and whose special area of interest is the political novel, is eminently qualified to fill this gap. The book, it is hoped, will be of interest to a large variety of scholars, for it includes studies of quite a few of the novels which have carved out for themselves a permanent place in fiction, both in India and abroad.

**INDIRA GANDHI AND THE EMERGENCY
AS VIEWED IN THE INDIAN NOVEL**

This One



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INDIRA GANDHI AND THE EMERGENCY AS VIEWED IN THE INDIAN NOVEL

O.P. MATHUR

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FOR MY LOVING AND DUTIFUL CHILDREN

MADHURIMA, PREMENDU, HIMENDU

AND SHUBHENDU

WITH MY PROFUSE BLESSINGS

FOR A LONG LIFE

ILLUMINED BY

LOVE AND HAPPINESS

On the earth the broken arcs; in the
heaven, a perfect round.

— *Robert Browning*

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Preface

In spite of the growing number of studies on Indian English fiction, there remains certain areas hardly touched. As far as political novels are concerned, much has been written on independence movement, the Partition, the Indian princely states, etc. But surprisingly enough, hardly any critical attention has been paid to the novels dealing with the Emergency the most traumatic period of post-independence Indian history. I have made an humble attempt to fill this gap. In fact, I also wanted to explore the novels on this theme, if any, in non-English Indian languages, if possible in translation. I contacted a number of scholars of many of these literatures available in Varanasi. But they all told me that to the best of their knowledge no novels on this theme had been written in their respective languages. This was confirmed by the total lack of response to my letters written to the Heads of the Departments of the important Indian languages in major Indian universities. It was only in Hindi that I could with difficulty spot out a very small number of novels dealing directly or indirectly with this theme. I have devoted a small chapter to them. My study thus is a fairly complete study of the Indian novels on the Emergency. I shall be much obliged if any reader brings to my notice any novel or novels on this theme in non-English Indian languages except Hindi.

B-32, Brij Enclave
Sunderpur
Varanasi - 221 005

O.P. Mathur

1

Introduction

A novelist sufficiently aroused with indignation into criticising a political system or political personages, past or present, has to tread cautiously, avoiding on one side the pitfall of degenerating into just a historian with a political slant, and on the other that of offending persons or political parties by making them the targets of his direct hit. So the novelist has often to (i) use similar or exaggerated events but give imaginary names to his characters, (ii) narrate roughly parallel but imaginary events and create different characters from the human or animal world, or (iii) create a similar or exaggerated intellectual or emotional atmosphere.

A novel of the first type would be a realistic novel, of the second type an allegory or fable pure and simple, and of the third type an allegory of ideas or atmosphere. A large number of novelists satirising political systems or figures choose the allegorical mode which, like the use of myth, has become a favourite narrative strategy of the modern political novelist. By both concealing and revealing, thus keeping the writer safe from the windy side of law, it provokes the reader's cerebration and gives him the pleasure of discovering the hidden meaning himself. Moreover, the narrative may allow ambiguity of interpretation. A myth also may be similarly interpreted. Sometimes the two narrative strategies may be used together, taking a myth as an allegory, as in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*. Northrop Frye seems to include both myth and allegory

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within the vast rubric of metaphor¹. Northrop Fry's observation is:

Whatever is constructive in any verbal structure seems to me to be invariably some kind of metaphor or hypothetical identification... While we read, we are aware of a sequence of metaphorical identifications; when we have finished, we are aware of an organizing structural pattern or conceptualized myth².

Thus whatever is the hidden meaning of allegory can also be called myth, or in classical Greek 'mythos', signifying, in the words of M.H. Abrams, "any story or plot whether true or invented"³ coming close to its Greek origin 'allegorie' ('agoreus' meaning 'to speak' plus 'allos', thus meaning 'saying one thing and meaning something else'). In this way by what Fletcher calls its "mixture of theme and image"⁴, allegory "has infiltrated modern realism, giving a number of novels of its type an abstract substructure of ideological message"⁵. Allegory has thus become a favourite instrument of satire over the ages. Significantly M.H. Abrams has also referred to the allegory of ideas which extends the parameters of allegory from the personal, social and political to the abstract⁶. Perhaps in this newly conceived type of allegory may be included satires on totalitarianism attempting to crush individual liberty. This type of satire cannot, of course, totally erase social and political dimensions, but the ideas are the axial factors. Before coming to the satires on the Indian Emergency (1975-77), it would not be out of place to cast a look at a few important satires, both direct and oblique, in modern Western literature. Perhaps the utopias (the word 'utopia' originally meaning 'nowhere') and the anti-utopias or dystopias can be included in this category. Such utopian

novels, like Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, an anagram of 'Nowhere' and William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (alas! 'nowhere', which cannot be re-written as NOW HERE, thereby making us undergo all the sufferings of the present) or Aldous Huxley's *The Island* (literally isolated and so implying rejection of the social and economic conditions of the day. Hilton's *Lost Horizon* is admittedly 'lost', never to be redeemed by us in reality. Even if we pass over H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, which with the potential beginning of a coveted utopian achievement, ends in a horrendous dystopia. These utopists, like Omar Khayyam, wish to rebuild a world nearer to their "heart's desire" because they cannot alter this "sorry scheme of things entire."

Some of the utopian writers have been explicit about their real objectives. For instance, when William Morris wrote about his 'Nowhere' (1890) the age was unblemished with tyranny which was the common bane of the nineteenth century....⁷ Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905) visualises a world state with no private property, only minimum work for an individual — the whole organization being only an instrument of social change⁸. A.C. Michaud in his *Our Coming World* (1952) "conveys a relevant plan ... and peaceful solution to deliver humanity from our predicament"⁹. In Huxley's *The Island* (1962) there are "No Alcatrazes here. No Billy Grahams or Mao Tse Tungs or Madonnas of Fatima"¹⁰. In fact, utopias are negative satires, "arising from their implicit, unattainable normative codes."¹¹ They can be called the flowers of a cactus country.

Though the utopias may be interpreted as dystopias in disguise, there are quite a few frank and open dystopias. The earliest, and still one of the best of them is Yugeny

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Zamyatin's *We*¹², which portrays One State in which individuals, identified by numbers, are steam-rolled into uniformity. ('We') against which one individual D-503 revolts by falling in love with a girl E-330, only to be ultimately defeated. The other notable dystopias are Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), *Ape and Essence* (1948) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), all of which are too well known to need any reference to their themes. They are all critical of modern social and political systems and foresee a disastrous end. Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) stands apart as a formal political allegory of a revolt against a totalitarian state, itself degenerating into what it revolted against. Kafka's *The Castle* (1953) and *The Trial* (1955) can be considered as existentialist allegories of the inscrutable universe as also perhaps of the present political set-up. In addition to these allegorical novels, there are quite a few which are more direct and realistic in their attack. They include, among others, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1941), Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipalego* (1973) and Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1958).

A sensitive study of the Indian novel condemning the Emergency of 1975-77 imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi reminds us of the techniques used by these writers consciously (as in the case of Manohar Malgonkar, for instance) or unconsciously, and so they form a part, though a small one, of the world-wide attack, mostly satirical and allegorical, on totalitarianism and much that often goes with it.

In modern Indian English fiction there were some novels of open protest, like Mulk Raj Anand's *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) against the British tea-planters. But no allegorical novel seems to have been produced during that

period. Among the regional languages, the present writer is aware of one work, a short play in Hindi, *Andher Nagari* by Bharatendu Harischchandra which can be interpreted as an allegory of a foolish ruler, possibly aimed at the Indian princely states. After independence only one occasion arose which could evoke protests all over India – the Internal Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi on 25 June 1975 and lifted by her on 21 March 1977. It provoked quite a few allegorical novels, with occasional dystopic dimensions. These novels, though with a common theme central in many and episodic or peripheral in a few, expressed in different fictional techniques attracted some well-known novelists like Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor and quite a few lesser known writers like O.V. Vijayan, Raj Gill, Ranjit Lal and Rohinton Mistry.

Public memory is proverbially short and three decades covering the life of a generation have passed. A large number of books and numerous articles in newspapers and periodicals have been written on it. It will, therefore, not be out of place if the leading features of the Emergency are pointed out so that the readers, especially the younger ones, may identify them when they occur in the novels under study.

The single most important factor about the Emergency right from its beginning to its end was the personality of Indira Gandhi – its strength and weaknesses. She had inherited from her father with the self-confessed, though in a lighter vein, potentiality of being a dictator. In an anonymous article published in *Modern Review* of 5 October 1937, he had analysed in a non-serious way, the hidden springs of his own character:

A little twist and Jawaharlal might turn a dictator sweeping aside the paraphernalia of slow moving democracy.... In normal times he would be just an efficient and successful executive, but in this revolutionary epoch, Caesarism is always at the door, and is it not possible that Jawaharlal might fancy himself as a Caesar?¹³

A true democrat at heart, Nehru mostly restrained himself from acting arbitrarily as a dictator. In his daughter this streak of character was more pronounced, as can be noticed from her decisions like nationalisation of banks, abolition of privy purses and indirectly showing the door to Morarji Desai. She would, however, have remained a democratic ruler. But certain events in 1974 and 1975 — a huge railway strike, agitations at many places, the defeat of the Congress in Gujarat and, under the dynamic leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan who stood for total revolution, a large scale agitation in Bihar. These incidents and the threat of a week-long satyagraha from 25 June 1975 were followed by the devastating court order of 25 June declaring her election invalid, though on trivial grounds, followed by the verdict of the Supreme Court that she could continue as Prime Minister without her right to vote in the Parliament must have been crushing for her. As P.N. Dhar, head of Indira Gandhi's Secretariat has noted that it appeared that she was thinking of resigning,¹⁴ but the Congress defeat in Gujarat also might have deterred her from ordering fresh elections. Then there was the influence of her dominating son Sanjay. Moreover, the agitation for her resignation, growing in momentum, was on the point of asking the police and the army not to obey orders. This was the last straw on the camel's neck, which luckily for her provided her the opportunity to invoke the constitutional provision for the imposition of internal emergency, and the strategy employed

by her to make the pliable President, already obliged to her, to sign the declaration at 11.45 p.m. on 25 June, and her securing the approval first of the cabinet and then of the Parliament only speaks of her quality of getting things done. But the fundamental question of why she decided to declare the Emergency remains open. Probably her father would not have done it, and if she had resigned just after the High Court verdict and dissolved the Parliament, she might have returned to power with a comfortable, if not a thumping, majority. Her personality remains the central point from the very inception of the Emergency.

The two actions that Indira Gandhi took, even before the Emergency was approved by the Cabinet, were the arrests of all the important leaders of the opposition, including Jayaprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and the stoppage of most newspapers from publication or circulation by cutting off the electric supply, followed by a regular code for press censorship. The Parliament, in which her party had more than two-thirds majority was summoned to amend the constitution.

As immediate follow-up measures Presidential orders suspended the right of detained persons to move any court and that no reasons were to be given for arrests under MISA. A number of arrests of journalists, academicians and persons from other walks of life, including 30 MPs continued to be made during the Emergency under MISA. A number of foreign correspondents were expelled and a few organizations like RSS and Anand Marg were banned. On the legal front, the Parliament approved the Emergency and the electoral laws were amended to nullify the court orders regarding Indira Gandhi and gave her immunity from civil

and criminal proceedings in future. The Emergency continued under the umbrella of stern press censorship and further arrests of other leaders and thousands of common people. Rather belatedly, a chapter on Fundamental Duties was added to the Constitution to the detriment of Fundamental Rights, and no court could accept any objection to these changes. Protests of various distinguished individuals and organizations, which kept coming, were ignored. The judiciary was 'committed' and the bureaucracy servile, signing blank warrants of arrest or writing notes on files according to the dictates of the 'higher-ups'.

The Emergency had fully seeped into the life of the nation. Since the facts about the working of the Emergency are either already well known or are available in numerous journals and books, only some significant points of reference may be highlighted here to serve as the historical context for the novels dealing with this theme.

- (a) The facts of the imprisonment of a number important politician and common people making, a total of over one lakh.
- (b) Treatment of prisoners in jails: Even VVIP's and VIP's treated as below:
 - (i) Some like Morarji Desai and Jayaprakash Narayan kept in solitary confinement.
 - (ii) Mrinal Gore kept in the company of two women – a leper and a lunatic – and with common toilet facilities.
 - (iii) Lawrence Fernandes, the brother of George Fernandes, one of the important leaders of the agitation gone underground, made to suffer continuing torture and humiliating behaviour.

- (iv) Jayaprakash Narayan released with damaged kidneys.
- (c) Meteoric rise of Sanjay, Indira Gandhi's younger son, to authority as an extra-constitutional source of power with his own caucus and feared and highly respected even by many senior politicians. Indira Gandhi's apparent fondness for and fear of him. Reported to have allegedly slapped her six times in a row. His mother sometimes nicknamed as the 'Empress of India' desiring to see him as her dynastic successor. His personal-finance-raising programme of launching Maruti Ltd., a parent company for other subsidiaries supplying clandestinely imported and junk material at high prices. His Four-Point Programme out of which two creating a great furore:
 - (i) the so-called City Beautification Programme causing large-scale bull-dozing of slums etc., one instance of which, the operation at Turkman Gate, hotly denied in his *Island of Truth*¹⁵ by Jagmohan, the then Chief of the Delhi Development Authority, who was blamed for it.
 - (ii) Sterilization programme with the laudable objective of population control implemented with unimaginable ruthlessness and barbarity, making the Emergency an object of anger and hatred.

The protestors against the Emergency included University teachers, certain English newspapers like *Indian Express* and *Statesman*, a large number of newspapers, films, etc. of regional languages. A number of foreign

correspondents like Mark Tully of BBC were all expelled. Many renowned foreign individuals and bodies in England and USA and two international organizations, Amnesty International and Socialist International were also critics of it. The only important bodies which supported the Emergency were the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the World Peace Council of the then Soviet Union.

It is not that the Emergency was only a dark devil. It had to its credit a few positive achievements also. In its early days the Emergency created a climate of satisfaction among the people, for they had no longer to bear the travails of strikes and agitations. Their daily lives became peaceful and somewhat less expensive, for the prices of essential commodities showed a downward trend. Strict punctuality in offices, trains and buses became the order of the day. Tax-evasion and smuggling declined almost dramatically. Due to raids and subsequent arrests black-marketing also came down. Sanjay's four-point programme inspired the people, though, as we have noticed, two of these points were later to stoke the fire of the anger of the people. But for the time being the Emergency was widely welcomed even in a part of the foreign press. The atmosphere of the country seemed for a while to be pervaded by a sense of discipline and the artist M.F. Husain celebrated it by projecting Indira in a painting as Goddess Durga riding a tiger.

But the grim reality of the Emergency was soon unmasked, holding out ominous warnings for the future. Only a few 'loyalists' in the country like the CPI and a majority of the Congress members continued to support it, as did the 'friendly' communist powers and a few African countries. It is probable that wide resentment and discontentment of the Indian people did not penetrate

sufficiently the thick screen of media censorship to sound a bell of alarm in the highest corridors of power. The sycophants might only have spoken what Indira Gandhi wanted to hear and kept her in the dark about the excess of the Emergency and the depth of the feelings of the people aroused by them. Moreover, after two postponements of the elections, she might have desired to legitimize her rule thorough a General Election and silence her critics abroad. Or was it, to give her decision to hold the elections a more favourable interpretation, that in the depths of the temple of her sub-conscious, Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter, had a veiled little shrine of love for democracy. Whatever be the cause or a compound of causes, Indira Gandhi, perhaps for the first time, courageously turned down Sanjay's advice, released all political prisoners and ordered General Elections, which were held in March 1977 leading to the stunningly ignominious defeat of Indira Gandhi and the rout of the Congress, sounding loud and clear the doom of the Emergency, hopefully for all times to come.

Very few of the vast number of journalists and other writers on the Emergency, if any, seem to have praised Indira Gandhi for what she did not do. As a true democrat she made no attempt to use the huge number of servile bureaucrats and police officials to rig the elections, even in her own constituency. Sick of all this rigmarole, was she knowingly committing political hararkiri? Or did she think of rigging the elections but gave up the idea? Whatever be the reason, but in any case she deserves full marks for it.

The Emergency ended with a bang which soon enough dwindled into a whimper. The oath taken by the new cabinet, with Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister, at Mahatma Gandhi's *samadhi*, the proceedings of the

celebrated Shah Commission to inquire into the excesses of the Emergency period, the unfortunate thoughtless, and hence extremely brief, arrest of Indira Gandhi – all ultimately came to nought. The parties forming the new government, with their different objectives, declared or otherwise, failed to see eye to eye. The masses, were not amused, and in the next General Elections, which had to be held prematurely in 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power, chastened, sober and dignified. And with the intervention of destiny Sanjay too was finally removed from the scene a few months later. The person who ruled as a dictator for only about three years and had been roundly defeated was neither imprisoned, nor executed nor expelled. She was honourably seated on the throne again. This could happen only in a dynamic and vibrant democracy like India. But here we are concerned not with the aftermath of the Emergency, but with the Emergency itself. Our focus is sharply limited. A calm retrospect after a period of well over two decades raises a number of interesting questions.

P.N. Dhar, showing more than leniency towards Indira Gandhi, has called the Emergency “a systemic failure” in which “the democratic substance started deviating from the form long before 26 June 1975.”¹⁶ The contention is, to say the least, controversial, for such a phenomenon seems to be to some extent observable in many democracies, including that in the India of today, where the majority opinion is not always allowed to prevail. P.N. Dhar’s interpretation completely leaves out the personality of the ruler, for, as go the sayings, “Personalities, not principles, move the world” or that “History is the biography of great men”. Though not always wholly true, these sayings point to the fact that another person, even Jawaharlal Nehru, under

similar circumstances, would not have imposed Emergency but chosen some other alternative.

A few individuals – the weak and pliant President, a headstrong Prime Minister trying to cling to power at any cost, the Son acting as a dictatorial father – these are not systemic failures, but individual traits, caprices, greeds and ambitions. Kuldip Nayar has very well analysed some of the characteristics of Indira Gandhi – courage, treating results as more important than means, and above all, her thinking herself to be indispensable. In this connection one can recall what JP wrote to Indira Gandhi, “Madam, Don’t equate yourself with this great nation. India is immortal, you are not.”¹⁷ But this is precisely what she seems to have forgotten.

Indira Gandhi could not have done better than to apologise for the imposition of the Emergency. In fact Ram Jethmalani privately made her an offer to do so and her response consisted of two questions, “Have you got your government’s permission to make this offer? and “who will draft the apology?”¹⁸ Jethmalani had no reply to give. But if she really wanted to apologise, nothing was there to prevent her from preparing her own draft.

It would be equally interesting to note what Justice Jag Mohan Sinha, who had pronounced the famous judgement on 25 June 1975 unseating Mrs. Gandhi, has to say about it now. He calls Emergency as “the blackest period of post-independence India”. But at the same time he goes on to observe that violations of fundamental rights is still continuing on a large scale. In his own words:

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There is no official Emergency today, yet the atrocities persist. It appears we have learnt no lessons.

These are dangerous portents, and unless we take serious notice today to rectify these evils, the much maligned Emergency may recur, albeit in a disguised form.¹⁹

Indeed what is important is the lesson, if any, that we have learnt from the Emergency. It has been said that the battle of freedom is never won and its fields never quiet. Lord Acton says, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty". And the nation will have to go on paying this price. Perhaps one of the most incisive comments on the Emergency is in the form of a poem entitled 'Gandhi at a Cross-Road' which was composed and also read on the All India Radio during the Emergency:

To the Gandhi standing on a pedestal I said:
To me you seem a Traffic Inspector
Made permanent
on a government post. ...

Again I said to him :
These asses are grazing on green grass
right under your nose
what's the use of your *lathi*, then²⁰

The *lathi* was wielded in 1977 to defeat Indira Gandhi and again in 1980 to bring her back to power. Are we sure that it will not have to be wielded over and over again? Or has it already been consumed by so many insects?

Much ink, more black than green, has been split by the numerous wise men of Hindustan and elsewhere on condemning and praising the Emergency from different perspectives. It seems to be high time to take a look at what our novelists have to say about it who have viewed it

through multiple fictional strategies focussing on the society or on the individual and presented it as crystallising the values of life in its transcendence into something higher — political, mythological or philosophical — that lies embedded in the Indian psyche which considers the world of senses as a divine allegory of the Supreme Reality, the Serpent dissolving into the Rope. Most of the Emergency novels thus are unlike the Western dystopias or even realistic portrayals of a totalitarian rule from which there is no escape.

The Emergency has been transcended by Salman Rushdie's fun and irony into a sort of divine overview, by Nayantara Sahgal into richness of art, by Raj Gill into a glowing idealism and a deep concern for human welfare, by Manohar Malgonkar into a patriotic drive towards democracy, by O.V. Vijayan into Love that overpowers the darkness of Sin, by Shashi Tharoor into the all-sustaining 'Dharma', by Rohinton Mistry into the vast ambience of Time in which the unfinished return-game of this life may be completed. The depression caused by the trampling of values in the Emergency is to a certain extent obliterated by its transcendence in most of the major novels which are the subjects of our study, as it was obliterated by the General Elections of 1977 which Shashi Tharoor so enthusiastically celebrates through the mouth of Ved Vyasa:

Ah, what days they were, Ganapathi! Bliss was it in that spring to be alive, but to be old and wise was very heaven. I saw the great cause of Gangaji and Dhritrashtra and Pandu thrillingly reborn in the hearts and minds of young crowds at every street-corner. I saw the meaning of Independence come pulsating to life as unlettered peasants rose in the villages to pledge their votes for democracy. I saw journalists

younger than the constitution relearn the meaning of freedom by discovering what they had lost when the word was erased from their notebooks. I saw Draupadi's face glowing in the open, the flame of her radiance burning more brightly than ever. And I knew that it had all been worthwhile.²¹

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21. Shashri Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 392. The reference to Draupadi is significant, for in the novel she is named 'D. Mokrasī', i.e. Democracy.

2

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: The Emergency as Another Midnight

Salman Rushdie's prismatic handling of the Indian Emergency (1975-77) against the vast background of Time, though mostly ignored by critics, forms a significant part of the vehicle through which he conveys his profound message to mankind. In *Midnight's Children* Salman Rushdie has attempted to restore his Indian past and its values to himself by making his narrative run along with the period of Indian history from the freedom struggle to the Emergency and its end, chiefly concentrating on two momentous midnight which turned the current of history in two opposite directions. One was the midnight of August 14-15, 1947 in which India awoke into freedom, and the other was the midnight of June 24-25, 1975 in which President Fakhurddin Ali Ahmad, at the instance of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, signed the declaration of the state of Internal Emergency which greatly damaged the achievements of freedom, at least temporarily, by extinguishing the rights of the people.

The narration of *Midnight's Children* runs at two levels simultaneously — history and imagination. The fictitious narrative of Saleem Sinai, explicating and commenting on the historical events, allegorizes India's emergence into a massive and democratic order through the

birth of 1001 (i.e. a very large number, in common parlance) children born around that historic midnight. Representing freedom of speech and discussion, these children occasionally meet for free discussion in the imagination of Saleem who, having been born exactly at that hour is their natural leader and convener. The strong olfactory power of his nose stands not only for his own sharp and perceptive sensibility about also for his curiosity for the acquisition of knowledge.

Interestingly, in the nursing home, there was a clandestine exchange of the two babies, Saleem and Shiva, both born exactly at the stroke of midnight. But the inherent potentialities of the two are so different that either the 'exchange' was just a 'show' or there was another exchange unknown to everybody, including Saleem, or they have merged and emerged in their true selves from the novelist's imagination based upon the materialistic theory of the governing role of environment over heredity. The last guess is probably the most likely.

In any case, the germs of the second and a sinister midnight, which is our main theme, are present in Saleem himself. Shiva, gifted with powerful knees suggesting thoughtless physical strength, becomes the arch-rival of Saleem. In the first midnight the nose has it and in the second, which comes about twenty-nine years later, it is knees that prevail, though their varying strengths culminate in a figure which ironically belongs to both.

The symbol of the second midnight, Aadam Aziz, is an interesting figure. His parentage, as suggested above, is shrouded in a mystery. He is the son of Parvati, who marries Saleem on the Republic Day of 1975, already impregnated

by Shiva. Saleem knows it, but accepts the situation, meekly “trapped by the lie of his impotence” (p. 495). He can only store the riddle of the mysterious fatherhood and genealogy of his son in one of his pickle jars: “Once again a child was born to a father who was not his father, although by a terrible irony the child would be the true grand-child of his father’s parents.” (p. 495). Like Saleem himself, his son is handcuffed to history even before his own birth. The progress of Parvati’s pregnancy is accompanied by events in the country’s politics, foreshadowing a new phase of history. Even before Saleem’s marriage to Parvati, there is an inauspicious omen, the death of L.N. Mishra, the then minister of railways, in an explosion at Samastipur. The events on the political front are mirrored in the progress of Parvati’s pregnancy. As the clash between the people’s front, formed by a union of various political parties grows, Parvati’s belly also goes on expanding till the flash-point is reached at 2 p.m. on June 12, 1975 when the judgement against Indira Gandhi is delivered and Parvati’s labour begins, reaching its climax at the midnight of June 12, when the baby is born, and “elsewhere the Prime Minister was giving birth to a child of her own”. the labor of both came to a successful conclusion and

at the precise instant of the birth of the new India and the beginning of a continuous midnight which would not end for two long years, my son, the child of the renewed ticktock, came out into the world. (pp. 499-500)

The birth of his father Saleem was not only quick and easy, but it was also welcomed with clock hands joined together, while his child is born after a thirteen-day-long labour. One led to the gay dawn of independence, the other

to "a continuous midnight" full of "silence and fears across the country" (p. 500)

The contrast between Saleem and his child Aadam is also marked. Saleem's long and highly sensitive nose is in his child converted into large ears and big eyes, and the ears "flapped so high and wide that they must have heard the shootings in Bihar and the screams of lathi-charged dock-workers in Bombay." (p. 501) Saleem's meandering verbosity, going round, backward and forward, in his child becomes absolute frozen silence. The characteristics of Saleem are those of a vibrant democracy — curiosity for and freedom to acquire knowledge and the freedom of expression; while his son's physical features are a prism of the Emergency. An important fact, often overlooked, is that Aadam is really the child of divine "Shiva-and-Parvati." (p. 500) Who could he be except "the elephant-headed Ganesh" (p. 500), with his large flapping ears and the hidden invincible strength of a god, the lord of the people ('gana' + 'eash')? This is revealed partly in his determination to resist evil and not to speak, in spite of strong medication.

His 'bimbi' (i.e. navel) protruding from the belly is another interesting symbol. His resentment and anger at all the grunts and groans of the people are ingested through his large ears, but remain unexpressed in words or action. Simmering within him with a strong determination to resist evil and tyranny, they are expressed in a way unknown to the public through the 'bimbi'. It is his voice, potency and potentiality. Thus, he is one of a generation of "fearsomely potent kiddies, growing, waiting, and rehearsing the moment when the world would become their plaything (How these

children may, in the future, be identified: "their bimbis stick out instead of in)". (p. 5350).

Aadam is also suffering from Tuberculosis, a wasting deadly disease which is cured by itself with the lifting of the Emergency. In fact, there is something "darkly metaphorical" (p. 504) in all the abnormalities of Aadam, the child of his times which badly damaged reality so much that nobody ever managed to put it together again (p. 500). Saleem is right in insisting, "While the Emergency lasts, he will never become well." (p. 504) He is thus a pioneer of the democratic order — "a torch in a long dark tunnel ... a child of dignity" (p.536). The first word he utters after the Emergency is 'abracadabra' which may have been meant to be a cabalistic or magical incantation to rid the country of its evil, the Emergency, and possibly also to prevent its recurrence.

The Mother of the Emergency is Indira Gandhi who in this novel, has been repeatedly called 'Widow' (with capital 'W') — an appellation that often signifies the drying up of emotions, harshness, cruelty and, above all, supreme uncontrolled power over the household, i.e. the country. Saleem says,

we the magical children of midnight, were hated feared destroyed by the Widow who was not only Prime Minister of India but also aspired to be Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods, a multi-limbed divinity, with a center-parting and schizophrenic hair."(p. 522)

Rushdie makes one of her devotees called 'Widow's Hand' describe her as 'a manifestation of the OM', whom all the

people of India worship like a god and of which all the three hundred and thirty million gods of Hinduism are manifestations." (p. 521). Such a gross exaggeration makes her seem almost ridiculous—a Demon instead of a Devi. Her hair style, so characteristics of her, is also described with a mischievous relish;

if the Mother of the Nation had had a coiffure of uniform pigment, the Emergency, she spawned might easily have lacked a darker side. But she had white hair on one side and black on the other; the Emergency, too, had a white part—public, visible, documented, a matter for historians—and a black part which, being secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us. (p. 501)

Rushdie does mention Sanjay Gandhi also, but the responsibility is squarely placed on his mother, who is the perpetrator and the presiding deity of the Emergency and later on also its political victim, illustrating the truth that actions are ours but their results none of our own.

As confessed in the lines quoted above, Salman Rushdie is concerned with the dark side of the Emergency, though its brighter aspects are also mentioned in passing:

All sorts of things happen during an Emergency: trains run on time, black-money hoarders are frightened into paying taxes, even the weather is brought to heel, and bumper harvests are reaped; there is, I repeat, a white part as well as a black. (p. 517)

Rushdie himself is not a historian nor an eye-witness of the events. But he makes his persona Saleem Sinai witness a few, as largely a commentator who keeps his

stance shifting from sympathy and appreciation to amusement, irony, satire and outright condemnation, as the occasion demands. In treating the Emergency his focus is mainly on bringing out its spirit and not on acting as a chronicler. The core of the Emergency consists in what Indira Gandhi does or allows Sanjay or her other lieutenants to do. The main thrust of the Emergency was on 'beautification' by demolition, sterilization and imprisonment under MISA. Saleem describes all of them with irony. The infamous bulldozers pour out people who display unusual physical uniformity as if they were clones:

all the men had the same curly hair and lips-like-women's-labia, and the elegant ladies were all identical, too, their features corresponding precisely to those of Sanjay's Menaka, whom news-scrapers had described as a "lanky beauty", and who had once modelled nighties for a mattress company. ... the ruling dynasty of India had learned how to replicate itself. (pp. 511-12)

The demolitions of houses and jhuggis are open to public gaze, but what happens in sterilization camps is secret. Sterilizations are often castrations in disguise. In Banaras, Shiva's town, Saleem is sterilized under the orders of Major Shiva, his arch-rival. Suggesting the secrecy, fear and the dark intent of the perpetrators, the atmosphere inside the camp is eerie: "a table with a hanging lamp, and doctors, nurses green and black, their robes were green and their eyes were black. ... who, with knobbly irresistible knees, escorted me to the chamber of my undoing". (p. 522). In these camps all the midnight's children, already imprisoned, are operated upon in a way that they "ere denied the possibility of reproducing themselves" (p. 523). Shiva also

gets himself voluntarily vasectomised². So that seems to be the end of the race of midnight's children. But is it so?

I laughed because Shiva, destroyer of the midnight children, had also fulfilled the other role to lurking in his name, the function of Shivalingam, of Shiva-the-procreator, so that at this very moment, in the boudoirs and hovels of the nation, a new generation of children, begotten by midnight's darkest child was being raised towards the future. Every Widow manages to forget something important. (p. 525)

It is supreme irony, for Aadam Sinai, Shiva's natural son begotten on Parvati before her marriage, was growing up carrying onwards the characteristics of Midnight's children of whom Saleem and not Shiva was the true representative. Silent genetics ironically prevails over human intentions and planning. Saleem's "Sperectomy: the draining-out of hope" (p. 521) is only partially and temporarily true. When he, along with the other midnight's children, is in prison, he talks to them at length through a thin wall, telling them about himself and about the steep depletion in their number, but cheers them up at the end:

Yes, here is optimism, like a disease: one day she will have to let us out and then, wait and see, maybe we should form, I don't know, a new political party, yes, the Midnight Party, what chances do politics have against people who can multiply fishes and turn base metals into gold? Children, something is being born here, in this dark time of our captivity; let Widows do their worst; unity is invincibility! *Children, we've won!* (p.520)

His optimism is substantiated not only by their ultimate invincibility, but later on in their continuity also through Shiva's 'natural' child, but now his own 'son'—Aadam Sinai. But the optimism receives a jolt even after Indira Gandhi loses at the polls and "a six-hundred-and-thirty-five-day-long midnight" (p. 529) is over, for what follows is hardly an enthusing dawn:

the tattered hopes of a nation had been placed in the custody of an ancient dotard who ate pistachios and cashews and daily took a glass of "his own water". Urine-drinkers had come to power. The Janata Party, with one of its own leaders trapped in a kidney machine, did not seem to me (when I heard about it) to represent a new dawn. (p. 525)

The Emergency has ended at last, but depressingly, "not with a bang but a whimper". But the gloom is brightened by the return of Aadam to his father Saleem after his release. Aadam, bearing the same name as that of his great-grandfather and also that of the progenitor of mankind in more faiths than one, and wearing "a tee-shirt decorated with pink guitars" is a heart-warming symbol of life, hope, enslavement and the continued survival of mankind, maybe with "shadows of imperfection" (p. 548). The novelist's one empty jar in the novel will always remain empty, ready to receive the future products of the "chutnification" of history (p. 548) in which one hungry generations treads down another:

Yes, they will trample me underfoot the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as in all good time, they

will trample by son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and to be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes and to be unable to live or die in peace. (p. 552)

This world is progressing neither towards a utopia nor a dystopia. It is condemned to survive with this mild diseases of pale optimism and 'sperectomy' (draining out of hope). This is the best product of the "chutnification of history" that Rushdie can pulp out. It is a twilight and a chameleon-like world in which both good and evil are inextricably and unrecognizably woven, one sometimes quietly transforming into the other. One set of *Midnight's Children* will be kaleidoscopically replicated a thousand times along with the ambiguity of the identity of a Saleem and a Shiva, *Midnight's Children*, with such a different replication of the children of two midnights only illustrates this observation. One midnight might have made a highly readable novel, but the consummation of the novelist's view of world, life and time is reached by the portrayal of another midnight, that of the Emergency. Ironical, hilarious and condemnatory it is, but only of the surface, the profound message of the novelist is completed by the second midnight of the Emergency without which the novel might have been a highly interesting reading, but without the spire of a meaning.

References

1. All page references are unless otherwise specified are to Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 1980, Avon Books, Alfred A, Knopf, New York, 1982.
2. Rushdie later wrote a funny story on a voluntary sterilisation during the Emergency by a rickshaw-wallah fond of 'conjuring reality', in the hope of getting a radio as free gift from the Government which never materialises – ('The Free Radio' in *East, West* (Vintage, London, 1995, pp. 17-32).

The Emergent Dictator in Raj Gill's *The Torch-Bearer* A Phoenix Too Infrequent

Raj Gill, who wrote a novel *The Rape* on the Partition, has written another on the Emergency as well. *The Torch-Bearer*, while touching upon certain aspects of life during the Emergency, captures the essence of the period in the personality of the Leader.

Raj Gill has handled at least two other themes – the ‘feminist theme of the phenomenal rise of a village girl to the most powerful office in the land, that of the Prime Minister, and the political theme of the difficulties of an unselfish and idealistic politician who wants to serve the people sincerely and selflessly, abolish class distinctions and root out corruption from public life while maintaining herself in power by her astute strategy. The novelist’s narrative technique, based on his own morally healthy point of view consists of omniscient narration heavily supplemented at appropriate places with flashbacks, sometimes fairly long, but leaving us in no doubt about his value-axis. It presents a situation Indira Gandhi never had to face during the Emergency.

The novel does portray many of the aspects of life in the Emergency (p. 91) including the rally organised by leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan (Karam Das), the threat of lawlessness held out by them which was apparently an

important cause of the clamping down of the Emergency and the mass arrests under MISA including that of Jayaprakash Narayan. Even at this time intellectuals like Jai tells his wife Shyamala Kapoor that “that poor woman”, i.e. Alvika (who is destined to be the Prime Minister), cannot be compared to a tiger (p. 15). The novelist has attempted to distinguish her from Indira Gandhi, though, like her she is also a compromise candidate for the post of Prime Minister (p. 167). She is the successor of the third Prime Minister (p. 167) who was Indira Gandhi herself and is described as different from “the haughty daughter of the Prime Minister” (p. 115). But at the same time she is called, like Indira Gandhi, “the only man in the cabinet” (p. 180). She is also similar to Indira Gandhi in her moral strength (“the shakti of Lord Shiva, pp. 181-82) and in her astute political strategy. At her moves even a seasoned politician like Krishen Prakash can only wonder (pp. 192-93). With a pliable and weak President in office she clamps down the internal emergency, without taking her colleagues into confidence, to silence effectively her political opponents and adopts the slogan “Garibi hatao” to placate the common people. The novelist makes her adopt many of the features of Indira Gandhi’s regime. During the Emergency swooping down upon her opponents, including Karam Das (Jayaprakash Narayan), harnessing the wild youth power to stage huge rallies in her support (p. 156) giving the police freedom to arrest anybody under MISA, imposing complete censorship on the press (eg. pp. 52-53), and above all, going beyond what Indira Gandhi did during her Emergency, ordering compulsory sterilization for men over fifty years and for women over forty. This results in strong public resentment:

The natural gaiety of the people was not there. It was like living a sleepwalker’s life like robots

operated by remote control. There was something fake and untrue about the whole scene. The spice of life was not there... (p. 216)

The conspiracy of her political opponents is to overthrow her by a presidential order or by a no-confidence vote in the Parliament which is going to meet a day later. However, in spite of all this, the positive side of the Emergency under Alvika is not ignored either — punctuality all round, prices kept under control, efficiency in offices, etc. (p. 216).

But there are important points of difference also between the actual Emergency and the fictitious one. Unlike Mrs. Gandhi, Alvika comes from a very humble background and, in addition, suffers in the early part of her career from the stigma of being a ghost, having risen from her funeral pyre with one or two marks of burning on her chest. Moreover, she has no husband, no son, no member of her family whom she could groom as her successor, though she has a lover with whom her relations are tenuous and fluctuating.

In fact, Alvika is a lonely idealist who, born in a poor rural family, falls from a staircase and, having been considered dead, is put on a pyre and 'cremated' in a hurry, only to rise like a phoenix from her own ashes:

She was born anew It appeared to her that all tragedies in her life were, in fact, a process of purification of her being. She felt like the legendary phoenix, arising out of the ashes of its own funeral pile, younger, more handsome, and stronger.

For the first time she was feeling..... as a whole individual, a human being with desires, wishes and feelings. (p. 90)

During the three stages of her life upto her being put on the funeral pyre, her finding her own path and getting settled in a city, with a new name 'Alvika' substituted by her employers for her old one 'Ambika', and her entering into politics at the rock bottom of cleaning garbage in a house in a slum and gradually working her way up by her sincerity, utter absence of any selfish motive, hard work, humility and ability, her combination of tact and toughness in entering the local bodies and then the parliament, ultimately becoming the Prime Minister, as the unanimous choice of warring groups of the majority party, the National Socialist Party.

During her eventful career, there are quite a few stages when she seems to be transformed into a new being like a new phoenix being born every time. But essentially every new phoenix is a continuation of the old ones – her struggle "to recover her identity, her right to live and love". (p. 31), her depth of character reflected in her "dark, big and mysterious eyes." (p. 79)

Since her ill-treatment by the villagers after her "cremation", the fire of vendetta (p. 139) against men raged inside her which surfaced after she was first humiliated at the moment of love-making on account of the burn-marks (p. 131) and then being ignored by Krishen Prakash for membership of Rajya Sabha. In her subconscious she had wanted to take her revenge from the menfolk, malehood which considered women as chattels to please their whims and fancies, and she enjoys "her new-found hatred of mankind which is vicious, spiteful, vengeful, merciless, relentless, and blood thirsty." (p. 133)

The fire of revenge against mankind that was originally lit in her by her being discarded as a ghost by the

villagers makes her nurse a volcano underneath that visible iceberg (p. 115) and it reappears as hatred for those who oppress the poor, especially the Harijans. (p. 161)

She seems to want to remould the world nearer to her heart's desire in the way she had rearranged the photographs in the room of Kundan, one of the members of the family with which she was living earlier. The rearrangement spoke of "the asperity of nature, struggle of life, hope and confidence." (p. 94)

The novelist thus seems to transform her negative reactions of revenge into the positive ones of love for the down-trodden, who constitute a vast majority of the people of India, and to improve their lot by abolishing evils like corruption and exploitation. If she desires power, it is for this objective and not for any selfish motive. Even in her early life she had noticed that "Lying was an innocent routine like breathing and sleeping" and that people "who preached did not themselves practice it" (p. 82). She reflected, "Was there any justice in life,.... why was one handicapped, another hungry and a third one having everything good in life?" (p. 83). She is an idealist born out of the life of suffering. When she meets Jawaharlal Nehru, she is deeply impressed by his sternness, his "non-nonsense air" as much as by his affection, humanness and warmth. This sows in her the seed of the wish to attain power:

He gave her the first yearning to become somebody, to lead the nation to the front line in the world arena. It was also the first time she thought about politics and Parliament. How wonderful it would be if she could also one day be the leader of the Nation like Nehru. She decided

to follow Nehru in all his principles and precepts. She might not become Nehru or the Prime Minister of the country. But she still might be someone to reckon with. (p. 112)

Thus, her negative vision of revenge turns into a positive idealism of leading the nation to fight for hypocrisy and corruption and to work for the betterment of the life of the people. To attain Power with the warmth of love for the nation — this seems to be the hidden spring of Alvika's complex personality and her decision to impose internal emergency. She herself analyses her feelings and objectives. As she observes the many incidents of arson, violence and destruction of public property at the instigation of selfish politicians with lust for power. She wondered:

Cannot a person rule without being untruthful to the people? Cannot a person rule without power or use of force? If you meant good to the people they will love to have you as their leader. Then why do not these politicians act good, think good and deliver good? (p. 159)

She also thought of the Harijans and the injustice being done to them even after reservation and decided to fight for them. (pp. 160-61)

It was with these noble objectives that the Emergency was declared by her. The objectives, however, remain largely unattained and she is forced to call a session of the Parliament on the next day in which a censure motion against her is sure to be passed.

Alvika has more than once demonstrated her strength and shrewdness of political strategy like Indira Gandhi. But Alvika is differentiated from her. Essentially, she is a woman

with female longings which she has all along kept largely suppressed with the sole exception of her fond weakness for Krishen Prakash, whom she appoints as the Defence Minister to the surprise of every body including Krishen Prakash himself.

At times she seems to be playing a cat-and-mouse game with him, though in spite of being spurned by him, she finds her ultimate spiritual and emotional solace in him alone. Then there is the essential womanly physical weakness also which too she has kept suppressed in her righteous lust for power. But though she remains a shrewd strategist till the end, her physical strength, which had been showing signs of cracking for quite some time, fails to sustain her beyond a certain point. Krishen Prakash, with his mature experience, is able to read the critical signals of her failing health, displays remarkable qualities of leadership by making absolutely reliable arrangements for her medical aid and for the armed forces to stand by in case of any unexpected development.

Krishen Prakash, who still loves her, shows his concern by warning her of the looming danger of being outvoted in the Parliament. But she takes it lightly, for she has already taken the necessary steps to obviate this possibility, though the art of attaining power and the craft of retaining it has made her pass through a state of high tension which, has already told upon her frail constitution. She seeks comfort in Krishen Prakash's company and puts her head to his shoulder and sighs deeply. Krishen Prakash rocks her like a child and:

He forgot his mission. He forgot the Cabinet, the Parliament and the rioting of the day. He forgot the world even. He was only aware of her body against his. He was aware of it in a protective

way, without passion or emotion. He sensed her shallow breathing and sudden tensing of her body. He also felt the chill of her forehead. He tried to lift her head and ask her if she was feeling all right. But she resisted and dug her nose deeper into his shoulder. (p. 238)

Then comes the news on the radio that the President has dissolved the Parliament and after dismissing the cabinet appointed the former Prime Minister (i.e. Alvika) as the Chief Administrator to rule the country with the help of six aides.

Krishen Prakash is so stunned on hearing the first sentence of the bulletin that he fails to notice Alvika's "sudden gasping breath and feebly clawing hands." (p. 238). After hearing the full news he voices his admiration of Alvika promising her his love with unbelievable intensity. But, Alvika who has breathed her last after hearing the first sentence of the bulletin cannot respond to his tightening embrace. The sudden double relief of the assurance of Krishen Prakash's love and of the President's acceptance of her recommendation is too much for her feeble constitution to bear. The instant of her supreme joy both as woman and as politician has become an eternity for her, and her ambition of concentrating all power in herself to fulfil her selfless ambition of improving the condition of the common men, especially the lower classes, remains unrealized. As a champion swinger in her childhood, she had swung to the highest point in life and held snakes by the tail in politics as she had done literally in her childhood (p. 62). But she falls from the top of a staircase to be declared dead and 'cremated' — only to arise like a phoenix from the fire, as she did more than once, with feeling of being born afresh every time. This time again she dies when she is at the top of the political

ladder, but does not rise again as a new phoenix. What happens after her is an open question. The torch bearer, a frail woman after having moved up, not sparing herself and going on tightening, like lady Macbeth, the screw of the lid that hides an essentially womanly woman, not a ruthless dictator like Hitler or Mussolini, is one who seeks power only to better the lot of the nation. She is a unique creation in Indian Emergency fiction, and the novel is irrigated with hopes and ideals, unfortunately not quite realized as yet. The novelist seems to hark back to the ethos of ancient India if not the mythological one. The plot at places shows signs of manipulation — a flaw which many of the greatest novels of the world have not been able to escape. But in spite of all its neatness, the novel embodies a gripping tale and focuses on a central character who surprises us with her mastery of statecraft, evokes our sympathy for her essentially womanly qualities and inspires us with her glowing idealism. The pity of it is that such 'saint-politicians' (similar to Plato's philosopher-kings) who might also possess a burning desire for power, sturdy realism and masterly strategy seem to-day to belong only to the realm of hope extended in the *Gita*. So does the ideal 'emergency' imposed by such a leader and hailed by the people.

Note: All page references are to Raj Gill: *The Torch-Bearer*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1983.

Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*: The Emergency Through The Riches of Human Conscience

Nayantara Sahgal has rightly been referred to as 'Lady Liberty' in the Editorial note on Geeta Doctor's Review of her *Lesser Breeds*.¹ Indeed, freedom has been one of the major "luminous torches"² lighting up much of Sahgal's work, not the least important of which being *Rich Like Us*³ a recipient of the Sinclair Prize of 1985 and the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1986, delineating a situation in which even after independence, with which her early work was so much concerned, a democratic leader has usurped full power and almost begins to view with the erstwhile colonial rulers in repression and economic exploitation. *Rich Like Us* is perhaps the only novel which subsumes the horrors of the Emergency in the consciousness of human beings affected by them. The chief character Sonali fed on the orgy of idealism (p. 35) unhaveable and intangible, acts as the prism through which the reactions of other characters are often filtered. The major characters are both individuals and representatives of their respective classes, and a few of them are also symbolic of the condition of mankind in general. It is the richness of human idiom through which the events are presented and which dwarfs them and puts them in their rightful place in the twin worlds of mind and time.

The story centres round Sonali, a young lady who is joint Secretary in the Ministry of Industry. Unaware of the secret deal between the Minister and a foreign business man and his Indian collaborator about the setting up of a factory for a fizzy drink suggestively named 'Happyola', she writes an unfavourable note on the file because the project, so unimportant for the country, is wasteful of precious foreign exchange. Poor Sonali does not know that the project is but the tip of an iceberg, for it is really a cover-up for the import and storage of car-parts required for the manufacture of an 'indigenous' car by the Prime Minister's younger son. Sonali is promptly transferred to her home state on a lower post and eventually dismissed from the I.A.S. Ravi Kachru, an old friend of hers, take over as Joint Secretary. The factory is now quickly established. The Indian entrepreneur involved in this shady business is Dev (or Devikins), the son of an old prosperous businessman Ram, now totally paralysed. Dev forges his paralysed father's signature and, with the officially inspired connivance of the Bank Manager, withdraws huge sums from his father's account. The real loser is Dev's stepmother Rose who becomes anxious about her own future. She voices her suspicions and anxieties, but before she can do anything, she meets an 'accidental' death (officially dismissed as suicide) by drowning in a nearby well not easy for her to reach. Her death is really the handiwork of the toughs of the youth wing of the governing party. Ravi Kachru, who by Sonali's wish tries to intercede in the affair, goes out of favour and is about to be shunted out of Delhi.

The objectives and functioning of the Emergency, its effects on the lives of the common people as also on those of a few individuals and their reactions have been glaringly exposed with force and sensitivity. Ignoring the judgement of

the court and other preludes to the declaration of the Emergency, the novelist plunges direct into its objectives which consist of the totalitarian ruler's ambition of a dictatorship being considered 'natural' and ensuring of hereditary succession which is also considered 'natural' (p. 91), for which the ruler's son is being groomed. The country is ruled by "one and a half people" (p. 37), and the Emergency is "a disguised masquerade to prepare the country for family rule" (p. 29). In fact, as an editor, the press having been already made subservient and the newspapers "newsless" (p. 193), puts it "Madam had in good faith thought it her constitutional duty to over-ride the constitution" (p. 94). A lawyer belonging to the now committed judiciary also gives his professional opinion "that the Constitution would have to be drastically amended, if not re-written, to give Madam powers to fight disruptive forces and crush the vested interests *she had been battling against since infancy*" (p. 94, Emphasis added). How very ably has the Emergency been defended by these professional people who should have known better!

The civil services too, earlier the steel framework of the government, have been made to crack so as to support the facade of the Emergency. Sonali's narrative voice, witty and ironical, never rises above the level of decorum and culture, yet scathing the attitude of the civil services towards the Emergency:

We knew this was no emergency. If it had been, the priorities would have been quite different. ... We were all taking part in a thinly disguised masquerade, preparing the stage for family rule. And we were involved in a conspiracy of silence. .. No one wanted trouble, so long as it didn't touch us, we played along, pretending the

Empress's new clothes were beautiful. To put it charitably, we were being realistic. (p. 29)

She finds that "the distribution between politics and the services had become so badly blurred over the last few years it had all but disappeared" (p. 28). Her old friend Ravi Kachru one of those civil servants who had begun to play politics "as if their lives depended upon it" (p. 28) becomes the "chief explainer of the Emergency" in "the current socio-economic jargon... those tongue twisters that have banished simple sentences for ever and made experts in one field incomprehensible to all others, and certainly to the public at large." (p.31) It is civil servants like these who become instruments of the political bosses and carry out their wishes, however irrational.

The Emergency is considered by the 'Courtiers' as a sort of millennium headed by a "Mother Tsar" (pp. 94-5) with her Twenty-point Programme, in whose support rallies are being held and delegations coming to congratulate her (p. 81) – all so ironically described:

And the emergency was so popular. You could tell by the delegations of teachers, lawyers, school children, and so on and so forth who went every day to congratulate the Prime Minister for declaring it. ... The general public were taken to the lawn. She took a chair and set looking at the wall above the heads of those facing her. ... There wasn't time before an audience with the Leader to think about anything because at any minute the door might open and the next person be asked to go in. But they shared the mystical glow of people doing the right patriotic thing, or pilgrims who had journeyed far and hazardedly to kiss the big toe already worn out with pilgrim kisses. (p. 81. Emphasis added)

There were youth camps also in which 'elderly' youths, 'toughs with pistols' (p. 80), participated.

The excesses of the government with immense powers comparable to those of the mythological gods (p. 229) consist not only of rapes of common women (p. 246) but also of the oppression of people like KL (Kishori Lal) and even Jayaprakash Narayan. KL, a researcher turned shopkeeper, tries to get over the pain of the torture of being severely whipped for nothing in his own way: "Thank heavens whips were not what one calls torture. Ordinary village school masters used whips and he was grateful now he had plenty used on him." (p. 207). But, as the narrator says, the domain of true torture lay ahead:

Amnesty International's accounts of it proved there was an everyman's library of torture now, classic, illustrated, itemized editions of it passed from country to country, ideology to ideology, knowledge freely shared. (p. 207)

K.L. learns in jail how, while those with influence were quickly and honourably released, other prisoners like an American educated boy, arrested on non-existent or flimsy grounds like a mere membership of the Marxist Party, remain there indefinitely. KL's reflections in jail make him think, "The Bhagvad Gita Said, the Lord speaking, 'Whenever there is decay of righteousness... I am born from age.' From age to age. But righteousness had decayed and rotted. And there was no sign of renewal or rescue that KL could see." (p. 214)

Sonali too, hearing how criminals were being blinded by the police with needles dipped in acid and herself noticing the brutal treatment meted out to a boy on a public road, wonders how people could tolerate what she calls "this bogus emergency" (p. 36) and whether "there was a collective will to

cowardice”(p. 35). Such a comment is indicative only of Sonali's own resentment and anger, for she has herself observed that even within one month of June 26, a month of censorship of the media, artificial silence has started exploding and the facts carefully concealed “shriek out to be noticed” a sullenness building up along New Delhi's heavily policed roads.

It did not need much imagination to sense the hate and fear inside the vans with iron-barred windows, like the ones used for collecting stray dogs for drowning, that now roamed the streets picking up citizens for vasectomy... We knew there had been hunger strikes and a breakout of political prisoners from Tihar jail because the government had printed a denial. ... with the unmistakable apparatus of authoritarianism all about us, if we could be certain of one fact, it was that everything was not all right. (p. 27)

The novelist's personal experience of the travails and reactions of the common people being severely limited, she has only given us what she might have got from newspapers, journals and books. The “pity of it” rings rather bookish. In any case, she seems to suggest that the horror, if not the agitation in their reaction, are comparable to those under the British rule.

However, this minor, flaw has been compensated for by the novelist's suggestive portrayal of how the wealth of the nation is being plundered by a few represented in the novel by the goings on in the Ramrose family. With Sonali as a family friend, this household has been projected as one representing some of the more shady aspects of the Emergency set out against the best in the Indian tradition as also the serene depths of a universally loving nature and pure conscience. The names of the characters are significant. Ram, a

businessman with traditionally business ethics, rises to acquire substantial wealth and two wives — Mona, a religious, trusting and loving Indian woman, and Rose, a foreigner who completely merges into the Indian ethos. With only one son between them, Dev who is Mona's child, they are fully adjusted to each other. Mona passes away early, leaving the care and the impending marriage of the unruly Dev to the loving and grief-stricken Rose. Not much later, his father Ram, holding a joint bank account with Rose is completely paralysed after a violent quarrel with his son. Dev's monster-like greed makes him withdraw huge sums from that account by forging his father's signature in the full knowledge of the bank manager who has only to go on letting them be cashed (p. 235). Dev had already become overnight a highly successful entrepreneur to the amazement of his mother:

What you call enter-prenner-ship, how you pronounce it, is one minute you're nothing and the next minute, you're an enter-prenner and a bloomin' millionaire. Where's all this money come from all of a sudden, I'd like to know? I like maharajas better. (p. 12)

The only obstacle in his complete possession of the wealth of his father, the "old fogey", as he considers him (pp. 23-4) to be, is Rose, the less educated but much more loving, large-hearted and gifted with a sturdy commonsense, charming both outwardly and in her inner being. And Dev decides to put an end to her life by having her bound and thrown into a nearby well by one of the toughs of the 'youth' camp. The murder is given out as suicide, though Rose could neither walk the distance nor climb to the wall of the well nor had any motive to kill herself. But no questions are asked. This murder, witnessed by a handicapped beggar, is presented as one of the

darkest blots on the Emergency in the novel, for Dev is appointed a Cabinet Minister and even his apparently simple doll-like wife Nishi, meaning 'night', with all its suggestions of darkness, tries to explain the 'reasons' of Rose's committing suicide to Sonali who was feeling "a freezing baffling anger" (pp. 251-52). In fact, Rose had also become somewhat dangerous for Dev, for with her strong commonsense she had begun to develop suspicion about the famous People's Car project and had begun to air them before others. Commentating on Dev's mention of nationalizing the 'indigenous' car project launched by Madam's son once a few models are ready, for which, as Sonali knows, parts have been imported from abroad, Rose with her strong commonsense sarcastically comments:

Sounds like the emperor's new clothes to me. First of all there's no car, and then you nationalize the one there isn't. And in all these years what you're saying is there isn't even a model.... 'Oo was supposed to be producing this famous car anyway, 'im [i.e. the Madam's son] or the Japanese? (p. 235)

Rose had also come to know unwittingly from Nishi that the underground 'bomb-shelters' are really meant to store 'black' money coming from "dummy companies and dealers who are going to exhibit the car when some models are ready" and also to store car-parts arriving from abroad and coming "straight from the airport without clearing customs" (p.236), as also about the manager of the bank "that had made huge advances for "The Car", knowingly cashing forged cheques (p. 238). The cheques were really on Ram's account which legally belonged to her. Obviously, the gentle and charming Rose had not only become an obstacle in Dev's financial

misdeeds but also a political risk. She had therefore to be put out of the way, and she was.

The intelligent observer of all these silent and wicked goings-on is Sonali, with her inner quality of "Burning bright" which influences Ravi Kachru, earlier the "chief explainer of the emergency" (p. 260), so much that in trying to speak to Dev about the forged cheques he goes out of the favour of the establishment and is to be soon shunted out of Delhi. Her penetrating observation, sensitivity and low-keyed narration illuminated by a heroically moral stance seems to make her an *alter ego* of the narrator-novelist whose telescopic multi-voiced view of the scenario is supplemented by Sonali's close scrutiny of persons and events informed by her memory, reasoning, passion, conscience and idealistic perspective. Their narrations, mostly one following and reinforcing the other, project a sort of binocular, though ethically uni-axial vision of some of the complexities of existence under the Emergency. Sonali herself, dismissed from the highest administrative service of the country, becomes one of the victims of the Emergency.

But at the other extreme end of the social spectrum there is another pitiable victim, a pathetic symbol of the repression of their people and their suggested regeneration. He is the Beggar whose recurring appearance in the novel, often at some crucial moments, keeps us reminding of the horrors of the Emergency, of "the citizens broken on the wheel for remembering their rights" (p. 258) – a share-cropper, with his hands chopped off along with those of another labourer, by the landlord's men for making them an example for others not to attempt to claim their shares in future. No law or political party helps them in the landlord's raj during the second year of the police occupation of the

village – there is such an understanding between the two. The helpless Beggar makes Sonali feel, “Power had changed hands but what else had changed where he lived? If ever there had been an emergency, it was this” (p. 258). Even Rose notices that the Beggar is a living object for the literal practice of Mahatma Gandhi’s teaching of wiping the tear from every eye, for the Beggar cannot do that himself (p. 128). He also acts as a catalyst in bringing out the inner reality of characters like Nishi, on the one hand, who screams and recoils from him, and, on the other hand, of Rose who feeds him and of Sonali who almost empathizes with him, considering him “the only sane person around” (p. 221), and warns him to say nothing about his having seen Rose having been bound, gagged and thrown into the well, for she has discerned, “As regards justice for the dead which would never be done there was no need to imperil the employment and security of the living” and, as she feels, “the dead Rose too would want him to be safe” (p. 256). It is Sonali who gets artificial hands made for the Beggar and takes him with her, “a confident candidate for a new future with artificial hands”(p. 257). He is almost a symbol of the Emergency as a whole. Leaving the Emergency behind, he moves towards a positive goal, as does Sonali in an entirely different way, for no longer does she have the hope of Ravi Kachru’s returning to grace and her reliving with him the long-past days of love making, forgetting the Emergency and “the absurdity of it all.”(p. 262)

Poor Rose is dead, but the other major characters on the side of positive values, the “we” as against the “they” on the other side, get over the trauma of the Emergency in their own ways, the most magnificent of them being Sonali. She now takes up the study of the decorative arts of one of the most glorious periods of medieval India, from the mid-

seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century which, in her own words, reminds her that "I was young and alive, with my own century stretched out before me, waiting to be lived." (p. 266)

The end of the Emergency is not shown, nor is it necessary, for it is submerged and extinguished by the swirling richness of the affirmations of the poor Beggar and the upward curve of the enrichment of Sonali's personality, as also under the richness of "the unbroken continuity" (p. 264) of our long and mosaic-like history and civilization along with its vast mythology often referred to in the novel. No one is rich like us, and beside all these luminous varieties of richness even the materialistic West is poor and the dark and transient Emergency too, with its stark poverty of conscience, is dwindled and merged out of existence.

References

1. *India Today*, 11 January 2003, p. 94.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Nayantara Sahgal, *Rich Like Us* (Sceptre Edition, 1987). All subsequent references to this work are to this edition and have been absorbed in the text by giving page references in parentheses.

Manohar Malgonkar's *The Garland Keepers:* a Thriller with a Difference

Manohar Malgonkar is an internationally recognised Indian English novelist whose fictional output is remarkable for both its thematic and technical variety. Most of his novels, however, are action-packed with more emphasis on the story than on character. *The Garland Keepers*¹, the main action of which takes only six days or so, is stamped with cinematic technique and can be easily transcreated as a screen-play. Its short scenes, sudden transitions, murders, detection and an ending totally unexpected, in spite of its key having been already provided, is extremely gripping. But spying, though not entirely absent, is not its core, nor is its central character a spy as such : he is, on the other hand, a deserter who has found an excellent refuge which brings to him an immense amount of pelf and power. M.K. Naik's considering it, along with *Bandicoot Run* as "a spy story" or as "fiction of espionage"² is somewhat surprising. The comment seems to ignore the novel's obvious dimensions of an allegory of certain facets of the Emergency. The very title of the novel, as the author himself indicates by giving an extract from 'the etiquette of flowers,' refers to court favourites who are the ultimate repositories of the garlands presented to the ruler. The title thus, helping us by its indirections to find directions out, gives the novel a touch of sophistication.

Manohar Malgonkar has, interestingly, prefixed an 'Author's Note' to the novel, which is really an avowed affirmation coated with a denial, possibly to keep himself safe from law. The Note reads:

The Emergency which forms the background for this story is not the 1975-77 Emergency, but a fictional one, supposed to be imposed some years later. Similarly, The National Democratic Front is not either the Janata Party or any one of the Congress factions, and the Great Leader is only a creature of the author's imagination. At that, since all fits of national epilepsy must show some common outward symptoms, some of the events in the book may have a passing resemblance to those that took place during the days of that earlier seizure. This would be no more than a coincidence.

This disclaimer has to be taken with a generous pinch of salt, for the dedication of the book itself to some important personalities who stood against the Emergency, "when the lights went out" reveals the author's real inspiration for the novel.

Malgonkar does not target the Emergency in all, or even most, of its aspects. He focuses mainly on one or two while a few others are unavoidably brought within its parameters. True to his genius, Malgonkar weaves a thriller out of the rich multi-coloured canvas of the Emergency. The pervasive colour is black, the colour of mystery, though the chief character Swami Rajguru, a friend, philosopher and guide of The Great Leader, goes about clad in spotless white apparently standing for transparent spirituality. This contrast is central to an understanding of the nature of the Emergency, itself white for the outsider but really all dark at the core. The

whole novel, in fact, is saturated by this root-contrast between appearance and reality.

The novel begins with one Naik Fida Ali, born in 1928 in a village Pandu in Gilgit, who, having joined the Pakistan army and having been sexually assaulted by his fellow-soldiers, deserts the army and manages to join the Tashi-Lumpo monastery near Gilgit (p. 59), where the number of monks was restricted to thirteen. By killing one of the monks named Pulakashi and assuming his name just before the one-year period of compulsory silence is to end, one of the monks named Angaraka, coming from the same part of Kashmir as he, dies by falling down a Khud. Obviously, it was another murder committed by Fida Ali, now 'Pulakashi' to prevent his identity being disclosed by monk Angaraka. 'Pulakashi' then studies philosophy, metaphysics, yoga, etc for many years and then leaves for other places.

As on the silver screen, the scene shifts to New Delhi where the Great Leader, whose name, age or sex is never clearly identified and who remains throughout a shadowy figure, mentioned but never seen or heard, has declared a state of Emergency, and the government, functions under the order of the Great Leader's son and heir apparent, Kalas Kak and his two followers Kaul and Pashupat (derisively referred to by others as the Owl and the Pussy-Cat) and his friend Swami Rajguru, a holy man. They are the garland keeper's whose orders, conveyed only orally or on phone, have greater sanctity than the written orders of the highest bureaucrat, police officer or general of the army.

Kalas Kak representing Sanjaya is the 'heir apparent'. The word 'Kak' means the crow, which is a bird of ill omen.

However, the name suggests the crow Jayanti who pestered Sita in the forest.

Among the 'garland keepers' the most powerful is Swami Rajguru because of his apparent holiness, huge wealth, high style of living and a large number of attendants and disciples. Behind him is the whole power of the state crystallised in a painting of the goddess 'Shakti', done by a Polish painter, the "celestial malevolence" (p. 92) of which is perhaps meant to be suggestive of Indira Gandhi'.

Swami Rajguru lives in a big bungalow, euphemistically called 'Ashram', with his own guards, a fleet of a dozen cars, disliking even a touch by males but surrounded by his chief disciple Ekanti Ma and a bevy of charming young girls as attendants whom he, even at his declared age of ninety (p. 58), makes the victim of his lust. He is neither a vegetarian nor a teetotaler, but is fond of lemon-grass tea. What is special about him is his remarkable physical strength and his yogic powers through which he can achieve relaxation and balance of mind by standing on his head just for a minute. He has all the modern gadgets and is always clad in white. He wields immense political power and nobody dare disobey him. Even at a hint from him, murders can be committed and huge amounts manipulated. He has garnered immense black money and like the Great Leader acquired large properties abroad (pp. 192-3). He launders his ill-gotten wealth acquired by 'donations' and extortion, by sending it abroad and openly getting it back as donations and gifts from his foreign disciples, carefully keeping a record of all such transactions. He is trying to erect himself into a parallel source of power by preparing dossiers on all the important Indians and getting microfilms of all the dossiers deposited in a Swiss vault. Thus, though always smiling and clad in

spotless white, Swami Rajguru may be in some respects regarded to be a magnified image of an apparently holy man controlling the ruler.

As against these 'garland keepers', the services, civil, judicial or military, do not matter, for any officer can be promoted over the head of a dozen of his seniors, or dismissed, or even murdered if necessary. The judiciary, like the other services, is also expected to be 'committed'. Blank warrants of arrest duly signed by a magistrate, are available with the police in hundreds, empowering them to arrest any one they suspect of disloyalty to the Big Leader or the ruling coterie, or, for that matter, any one whom they want to be put behind bars and tortured. The official spying organisation is RAW, but there is also another powerful body known as the Dropout Brigade, a euphemism for the Youth Brigade, obviously consisting of the hooligans, the dropouts from colleges or universities. They organize rallies and help in carrying out the orders from above. Such is the political scenario of the Emergency.

The action of the novel is governed by a duality — the nefarious alliance between corrupt politicians and hypocritical holy men — pointing to the degeneration of both politics and religion in this land of Gandhi and Vevekanand. The object of this evil conglomerate is also two fold — Power and Money, both limitless. Kalas Kak has already endless power as the son of the all-powerful dictator in the Emergency. To earn more wealth he launches a car project to 'borrow' money from banks never to be returned and by raising money 'for the party' from the traders and large business houses like that of Surana. There are dozens of others ways of making money — kickbacks on all government purchases possibly running to

hundreds of crores, threats of income tax raids of stopping electric power to factories, denying certification for films, and many more which can be devised by "those in unchallengeable control of all the organs of the government" (p. 103). The money is only partly used for manipulating the floor-crossing by the members of the legislative bodies whenever necessary. The problem with those at the top is where to keep all this black money so that it may be readily available. The safest place is a bank under their control with instructions to hand over the required amounts against mere phone calls, of course with the connivance of the manager.

Thus the two lines of Kalas Kak and Rajguru run together, often intersecting and enforcing each other. The texture of the novel is woven out of their illegal activities and the hide and seek with the honest police officers who try to nab the culprits. Two of their illegal activities provide the modal points of the action of the novel. One is the bank- scam which is the tip of an iceberg. The other is the money-laundering indulged in by Rajguru. A young and honest Dy. Superintendent of Police, Om Prakash Agrawal, after thorough investigation has reached the bottom of the cases and prepared a secret file which he hands over for safe keeping to his Sister Netra Agrawal, personal secretary to Surana a business magnate. Dy. S.P. Agrawal is promptly got killed in an apparent road accident by Rajguru's men, for he has got wind of Agrawal's success in his investigations. The chief witness in the bank-scam, one Dorabji is imprisoned and ultimately killed by poisoning. Such are the ruthless ways of those in power, and it is two honest police officers Visram Lal and A.B. Chopra who secretly contrive to bring the highly placed culprit Rajguru to book, though the file so laboriously prepared by the murdered Dy. S.P. is ferreted out by Kalas

Kak-Rajguru axis by getting an Income-Tax raid made on Surana's offices and residences and found, as expected, in the room of Netra Agrawal. But through devious means the two brilliant honest police officers who are against the political set-up of the Emergency, are able to unravel the whole mystery after an assiduous investigation. Their momentous discovery about the Rajguru's really being Naik Fida Ali, the deserter from the Pakistan army, synchronises with the displacement of the Great Leader, and "some other hand" possibly the democratic group led by the defence minister "holds the whip hand now" (p. 195). The new government gives the O.K. for the arrest of Rajguru (Naik Fida Ali) and his extradition to Pakistan, and possibly "half the cabinet will be jumping for joy to have got the mafia off their backs" (p. 185). All this happens so suddenly that the reader's head reels with the twist in the course of the events. But there is another twist in the tail of the novel waiting for him, for the deserter Naik Fida Ali on being parachuted inside the Pakistani border does not get the capital punishment earned by him but is given a red-carpet welcome on the explicit order from Field Marshal Inayat Usman, given a chauffeur-driven car, lodged in a part of the Presidential suite and flown to Islamabad in an Air Force plane to see the President. This is because he had already conveyed to the Pakistan President the information through the Chinese embassy that he had microfilm copies of the dossiers on all the important Indians safely lodged in a Swiss vault. This was also the secret of his power in India.

The similarities between the Emergency and some of the events and characters of the novel, as already implied in the above discussion, are paralleled by factors that differentiate it. The conversion of the leader (the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces) into a ghost-like and

unidentifiable figure is perhaps understandable, for the novelist is an ex-army-officer. Some of the memorable features of the Emergency like the imprisonment of all important leaders, the tortures inflicted upon the prisoners in Tihar Jail referred to as 'Gulag' (p. 193), the bulldozing of all 'encroachments', and the plight of the sufferers, the forced and stupid family-planning measures etc., have been just mentioned, but not described in any detail. This is because the novelist wants to zero in on mainly one aspect of the Emergency — the pitfalls and dangers of a totalitarian rule in which the fate of a whole nation depends upon the whims, likes and dislikes, personal ambitions, credibility and mistakes of judgement of one person, and the 'garland keepers' like Kalas Kak and Swami Rajguru who, though a Pakistani, has been able to creep into the innermost corridors of power, launder his ill-gotten wealth, removing everybody who dares cross his path, while laying hands on the secrets of all important Indians and thus practically holding the nation to ransom. Perhaps no other Emergency novelist has laid his finger on this vital aspect of the Emergency, while they portray in their own ways what happened during the Emergency. The remark on the Jacket of the novel, though pertaining to Malgonkar's *Bandicoot Run*, can be applied to *The Garland Keepers* too as being a story 'that will leave you chilled, frightened, and numb with shock, not because it is violent but because it so closely approximates possibility, *it can so easily happen, it could have happened* . . ." [Emphasis added]. But it does not happen. The country remains safe. Here Malgonkar displays his confidence in the essential patriotism of the Indian people. Their devotion to duty against all odds and their ingrained love for democracy. The novel projects honest officers like Om Prakash Agrawal, Visram Lal and A.B. Chopra (like Sonali of Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like*

Us), "half the cabinet" (p. 185) who are sick of the mafia, ministers like the defence minister "a *dagabaz*" (p. 159) who overthrows the Great Leader to re-establish democracy, and even common citizens like Sartaj who are on the right side and save the nation from dangers, both internal and external. *The Garland Keepers*, though often casually dismissed just as a thriller or as a "spy story" has broader and redeeming dimensions of significant suggestively. It is a valuable political document, a frightening commentary on the Emergency, reinforced by quite a few references to the 'Kremlin' (p. 51), Huxley's '1984' (p. 52) and to Solzhenitsyn and Gulag horrors (p. 193).

References

1. Manohar Malgonkar, *The Garland Keepers*, Vision Book. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi., 1986. All quotations in this paper unless otherwise mentioned are from this book.
2. M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan, *Indian English Literature 1980-2000*, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2001, pp. 22,73.

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel: a Mythological Fantasization of the Emergency*

John J. White has rightly noticed:

"The 'return to myth' is often assumed to be a particular feature of the Modernist movement in the early part of this century. Although many writers of the Modernist era, including Eliot, Joyce, Kazantzakis, Pound and Yeats, were certainly pre-occupied with myths, such an interest is to be found with equal richness, and at times with a far greater intricacy of expression, in much subsequent twentieth century literature."¹

The critic also disarmingly identifies an important feature common to so many modern 'mythological' novels: "Rather than offer his reader new myths or revitalized old ones, the mythological novelist presents a modern situation and refers the reader to a familiar analogy"²

These characteristics also underlie many of modern Indian novels which have appropriated different Indian mythological territories, as in Anand's *Gauri*, Narayan's *The Dark Room* and *The Maneater of Malgudi*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope*, Salman Rushdie's *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*, etc. Shashi Tharoor, however, stands in a class by himself, for in two of his novels *The Great Indian Novel*³ and *Show Business*⁴ he

has, as he admits, attempted to yoke history and myth⁵, to look at India through the refraction of two kinds of light, the "light cast by the source" and "the light cast by a satirical view of the present."⁶ In *The Great Indian Novel*, he has, in addition, as the very title indicates, invoked our memories of the *Mahabharata*, which has become an inseparable part of the Indian psyche, with a skill that through even a disconnected and fragmentary narration of a major part of the twentieth-century Indian history he is able to resuscitate nearly all the essentials of the story of the *Mahabharata* as a more or less causally connected account, thus illuminating the presentness of the past and the pastness of the present. Jean-Claude Carrierc, a foreigner, records the deep impression that the *Mahabharata* made upon him as "a part of Indian Life", as dwelling in "the recesses of your soul"⁷ In modern post-independence Indian history, the immanent spirit has been our commitment to democracy, except for its brief eclipse during the Emergency. This short period seems to have cast a spell over the early Tharoor, for he has variously handled it in his early novels (*The Great Indian Novel*, and *Show Business*) and a two-act play.

In *Show Business*, the novelist is direct in his portrayal and trenchant in his condemnation of the Emergency. Pungently satirical, its chapter entitled "Kalki" describes through its cinematic vignettes passing in the dreams of the unconscious hero, Ashok Banjara, so many gruesome details: "an opulent city dotted with poor people" (SB p.85), a veritable wasteland with government officials heartlessly making the people suffer, and "and evil queen, with a hooked nose with white-streaked hair, seated on a throne of burnished gold while the land is scorched dry in dismay" (SB, p. 288-89), (all suggestive of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*),

surrounded by “courtiers who bend deeply from their copious waists”, and relentlessly passing orders of stringent punishments like tearing out the tongue of “a young woman clad in black and white, her material a coarse print” [the Press], and sentencing an old sage [Jaiprakash Narayan] who had persuaded bandits to lay down their weapons with his face “serene” in the knowledge of the inevitable (*‘Vinash Kale vipareet buddhi’*), to be locked up and starved. Videos like this go on till Ashok Banjara himself, clad in resplendent white [Morarji Desai?], possibly the Kalki Avatar, rises, to destroy the whole set in a conflagration. (S.B. pp. 291-92). Shashi Tharoor returns again to the theme of the Emergency, though on a much smaller scale in a two-act play, ‘Twenty-two Months in the Life of a Dog’ included in his book entitled *The Five Dollar Smile* (1990)⁸ in which a dog is the witness of the sufferings imposed upon the people during the period.

It is in his ambitious work, *The Great Indian Novel* that Shashi Tharoor has dealt with the theme extensively against not only a much broader canvas of history but has also highlighted its inner contradictions by attempting a sort of archetypal montage by presenting it as a contemporary *Mahabharata*, with its large gallery of characters, narrated by ‘Ved Vyas’ who is modernised not only in his name as ‘V.V. ji’ but also in his ironically ambivalent and varied strategies of narration. The cantankerous old narrator, doodles with the narrative and with himself as the narrator, almost like a modernist writer deconstructing both himself and the tale he is telling. His object is to weave and unweave, sew and tear, the political history of India from about the beginning of the twentieth century to the end of the Emergency and what follows it. All this is done by attempting to view it through the changing filters of irony which clarify and interpret the

contemporary political characters and events in lights varying from the most humorous to the most repulsive. Moreover, the narrator is neither sure of the ground on which he stands nor of the true nature of the objects and events he writes about. The only certitude is that there are no certitudes. He calls his view "ambivalent" (p. 368): It might perhaps be better called multivalent, for he says

"I knew that in India there were really no blacks and no whites; nor was there a uniformly dingy grey. Instead, political morality and public values were a mystical, blurred, swirling optical illusion of alternating blacks and whites in different shades of depth and brightness." (p. 368)

There is another difficulty too. Archetypal characters and events tend to reappear, but not all do so, nor in the same order or relationships. Hence, Shashi Tharoor's novel can be '*Mahabharata*' only partially and that too not without a great deal of stretching and manipulation making the parallels only partially applicable. But all the same, it must be said to his credit that he has generally got over these difficulties and while rendering the spirit of the '*Mahabharata*' with a fair amount of truth and vitality the author and the narrator are both conscious of the gulfs that separate an epic age from an "underdeveloped country" of the twentieth century. The contrasts are sometimes too glaring, but he has tried to get over them or made the best of them by bridging and gulf with a narrative of an irreverent or humorous vein, for incongruity is regarded to be the soul of humour. In a way, the post-independence Indian politics seems to have been interpreted as fluctuation in the fortunes of Draupadid Mokراسى i.e. D. Mokراسى (Democracy). It is after the death of Dhritrashtra (Jawaharlal Nehru, the great 'visionary' democrat who with his eyes fixed at the stars, failed to see the dangers and

pitfalls right under his nose) and the coming into power of his daughter Priya Duryodhani (a clever alteration of 'Indira Priyadarshini') that D. Mokhrasi's problems begin. Priya Duryodhani's revolt against the old Guard of the Kaurav Party (the Congress), her suggested marriage (in V.V.ji's dream) with Ekalavya (V.V. Giri), the decision to hold a 'swayamvara' in which only Arjun (the Press) is able to meet the challenge of opening the huge ballot box in which she stands, thus becoming her natural guardian. In the 'swayamvara' (outside V.V.ji's dream), D. Mokhrasi chooses Arjuna in the modern ambience of a coffee house or a seminar.

The approach to the Emergency is subtly traced from the rise of Priya Duryodhani who gradually consolidates her power and popularity. The important political steps she takes meet with D. Mokhrasi's appropriate responses. Duryodhani's appointment of Yudhishtir (Morarji Desai) as Dy. Prime Minister and sharing power with him makes D. Mokhrasi a little plump (p. 342) while his resignation makes her sick (p. 343), only to be revived a little by Yudhishtir's resignation in protest from the Kaurav Working Committee (p. 345). She again relapses into minor ailments at the 'resignation' of "the gentle Muslim Academic" (Zakir Hussain) from Presidency (p. 347) and the ascending of Ekalayava (V.V. Giri), Duryodhani's nominee, to it (p. 348). The transparency of Duryodhani's hollow slogan "Remove Poverty" makes D. Mokhrasi asthmatic (p. 352). Good health, however, returns to her after the hacking of Karnistan (Pakistan) into two parts and the formation of Gelabi Desh (Bangladesh) (p. 350). But all is not well in the country – the emergence of Jayaprakash Drona (Jayaprakash Narayan) from his retreat to lead a popular uprising against Duryodhani's inability to keep her pledges of

eradicating all the natural evils including poverty and a court's judgement finding her guilty of electoral malpractices, the natural corollary of which should have been her resignation. At this critical moment appears Shakuni Shankar Dey (here apparently a composite picture of Sidharatha Shankar Ray and Sanjay Gandhi) to advise her to impose a state of 'Internal Siege' (Internal Emergency) in which she can detain all the leaders of the uprising and also censor the Press. It is when the Internal Siege has been proclaimed that we enter the real struggle of the *Mahabharata* – the struggle between Good and Evil respectively by D. Mokراسي (Democracy) on the one hand and ruthless Priya Duryodhani's (Indira Gandhi's) dictatorship on the other.

The central events of the *Mahabharata* are rooted in two main 'battles' — (i) the game of dice, after which a futile attempt is made to disrobe D. Mokراسي, the Pandvas receive a sentence of exile followed by a year of exile in hiding, and (ii) the main battle of Kurukshetra which witnesses the deaths of numerous great warriors including all the members of the Kaurav party. With his hatred of a nauseous and sadistic totalitarian rule unwilling to share power or give away even a part of it to its rightful heirs, Shashi Tharoor links both these important 'battles' to the emergency — one to its tyrannical exercise and the other to the final battle which extinguishes it.

Rightly ascribed to V.V. ji's dreams is the game of dice representing the decrepit, falsehood, unashamed cruelty and persecution characteristic of the Emergency. The crushing of all the rights of the individual, including the right of privacy, is presented through the attempted disrobing of D. Mokراسي, who from her earlier role of a concerned observer now becomes its chief victim. In the earlier episodes tracing the contours of the Emergency, it is largely irony that

predominates, whereas this episode of the game of dice is dominated by anger, pity and despair. This seems to be the central episode of the novel, for it presents an unambiguous condemnation of autocracy and a cruel and direct trampling of democracy which was only tangentially and phonetically suggested by calling Indira Gandhi as Priya Duryodhani and Democracy as D. Mokراسى, while V.V.ji's representation of the actual battle of Kurukshetra would have presented difficult ethical complexities, in addition to numerous practical difficulties which we shall consider later. It is not that there are no such difficulties in the presentation of the game of dice. Before or during the Emergency there was no conflict between Indira Gandhi and three of the Pandavas representing the army, bureaucracy and the diplomatic services (represented by Bhim, Nakul and Sahadeva respectively). The court verdict which triggered off the Emergency also has no mythological parallel. At most there was a political struggle led by Jayaprakash Narayan (Drona, Duryodhani's guru!). Among the Pandavas only one, i.e. Arjun (the Press) was demanding Indira Gandhi's resignation. And among the important progenitors, both political and biological, Gandhiji (Gangaji or Gangaputra, i.e. Bhishma Pitamaha), Jawaharlal Nehru (Dhritarashtra) and a few others were not there to witness the disrobing. Karna (Jinnah) had long ago left for the country of his own creation and then for the other world. Thus the political contours of the India of the middle seventies of the twentieth century were quite different from those of the mythological game of dice as embedded in the traditional psyche. Shashi Tharoor has deftly solved this difficulty by employing the 'dream' strategy which, while having some recognisable links between myth and reality allows him ample scope for employing all the inventiveness of plot and character without the danger of

being charged with forcible manipulation. In this dream-world reality is presented in a new but appropriate apparel and the whole is charged with the irony of a modern Ved Vyas (V.V.ji), appearing as one who can afford the smile of the amusement of one "who has kept watch over man's mortality" and knows the reality as a sphere which he understands thoroughly from all angles and can play with it and recast at will the whole narration from new perspectives. V.V.ji, while being modern in his ambivalence (and also a true representative of the age of 'Dwapara', an age of doubts and ambiguities), is at the same time like the Lord, playing a willing role in his own creation. He gives us ironic peppery slices of modern history with jams of fantasy and dream.

But India is not a banana republic or an Arab country where democracy has no deep roots and an almost permanently be replaced by dictatorship. Here democracy cannot be suppressed for long:

No, Ganapathi, Draupadi was Indian; she was ours, and she had to wear a sari. We could not place her in universal beauty contests to be judged as her occidental sisters were, by the shape of her legs or the cut of her costume. If she had been wearing the skirts or dresses or even the trousers of Western democratic women, she might have been far easily disrobed. (p. 385)

After a temporary lull, Indian democracy tends to rise again from her ashes the sparks of which were in fact never extinguished. The harsh and totally undeserved sentence of a long exile passed against her five husbands may perhaps be interpreted as the brushing aside of the independence of the chief organs of a democratic government. All these selected details of the insensitive functioning of the bulldozer of the Emergency affect the lives of the common people with equal

ruthlessness a license for the police to do whatever they like — forced completion of sterilization-quotas, blind slum-clearance for the so-called urban renewal, increase in unemployment caused by the abolition of bonded labour, etc. (p. 384). At the political level it results in the suppression of the supremacy of the people by the so-called supremacy of an unrepresentative and frightened parliament as an instrument of Duryodhani's parliamentary dictatorship, and the abolition of the freedom of the press.

After abbreviating the long years of exile and the protracted negotiations of peace conducted by Krishna into about a year and a half, the narrator quickly makes Duryodhani unthinkingly jump into the General Election which is "a contemporary Kurukshetra" (p. 391). In fact, Kurukshetra is universal and eternal:

There was good and bad, dishonour and treachery betrayal and death, on both sides. There was no glorious victory at Kurukshetra. This election is not Kurukshetra; life is Kurukshetra. History is Kurukshetra, the struggle between dharma and adharma is a struggle our nation, and each of us in it, engages in on every single day of our existence. (p. 391)

Yet this Kurukshetra is non-traditional, for the issue is "the rout or the restoration of democracy":

I saw the meaning of Independence come pulsating to life as unlettered peasants rose in the villages to pledge their votes for democracy. I saw journalists younger than the Constitution relearn the meaning of freedom by discovering what they had lost when the word was erased from their notebooks. I saw Draupadi's face glowing in the open, the flame of her radiance burning more brightly than ever. And I knew that it had all been worthwhile (p. 392).

The *Gita*, preceding the actual battle, is represented as the advice of Krishna Parthasarathy (Lord Krishna) to Arjun (the Press) who is bedevilled by doubts whether to fill the nomination paper as a candidate or just keep writing. The famous conversation takes place in Ashok Hotel where V.V.ji, the narrator, sitting at the next table, overhears and records it. The concluding part of Krishna's speech contains among others, these significant words.

So Arjun, stop doubting : rise and serve India.
Serve me the embodiment of the spirit of the
nation (pp. 397-98).

At last Arjun decides to get the Opposition into an electoral pact.

The details of the battle of Kurukshetra (the General Election of 1977) have been completely ignored except in its conclusion, the defeat of Priya Duryodhani, largely because of the arrows of sharp criticism shot by Arjun (the Press). The ignoring of the actual battle obviously flows from the imposition of an archetypal framework on the twentieth century Indian politics resulting in the absence of a number of important warriors from the 'battle'. Gangaputra Bhishma (Gandhiji) and Karna (Jinnah) could not be presented as alive and fighting in 1977, and Jayaprakash Drona (Jayaprakash Narayan), could not have led his forces or even fought for her. The *Gita* has been fairly well rendered in a modern ambience in Ashok Hotel, but there is no Dhritrashtra (Jawaharlal Nehru) to rule over the kingdom or to hear the *Gita* and to learn about the battle through the ears and eyes of Sanjay. In fact, his daughter was the ruler. It is unnecessary to prolong the list of such anomalies which make the presentation of the battle of Kurukshetra (General Election) impossible. And an election reassembles a battle only metaphorically. It is the two

main leaders and the result which are important, and they have been presented faithfully and forcefully.

Priya Duryodhani's defeat is well-deserved and complete. But the narrator's ambivalence is apparent even in these episodes, which ought to have been unmistakably white and black, but are not so. They are enveloped in a grey irony. The periods of 'democracy' which precede and follow the Emergency are not spotless. The popular government that follows the Emergency does not herald any joy or enthusiasm, because it is beset with weaknesses. Even 'Dharmaraj' Yudhishtir (Morarji Desai) has made himself not an object of veneration but of amusement, because of his openly practicing and preaching 'auto-urine therapy' and his odd dietician preferences.

The Emergency, as portrayed in the novel, is not followed by a period too glorious or hopeful for the country. And the Emergency itself is perhaps not as black as it is often portrayed to be. Possibly this factor along with the disenchantment of the people with the type of 'democratic' government that replaces the Emergency leads to the return of 'Priya Duryodhani' to the throne after a brief period of three years.

The events of the novel viewed with a binary vision — contemporary and mythological, realistic and imaginary, serious and ironical — are reflected in the techniques of realistic descriptions and dreams of the narrator. The Emergency itself, howsoever condemned, had much merit in it. V.V.ji believes that it saved the people from "the political chaos in the country, fuelled by Drona's idealistic but confused Uprising which a variety of political opponents had joined and exploited, could have led the country nowhere but

to anarchy." (p. 369). Moreover, there was the twenty-point programme, "a new sense of purpose where earlier there had been drift and uncertainty" (p. 369); the officialdom acquired a new work-ethic" to serve the common man far more effectively than ever before", (p. 369). "I had no doubt", says the narrator, "that more Indians would benefit from the abolition of bonded labour and the implementation of land reforms than would suffer from the censorship of articles however well Arjun could write them." (p. 369).

The declaration of the Siege, the arrests of the agitators, the silence in the streets, had been accepted by non-political India without a murmur. The only sound that replaced the months of clamour appeared to be the deflating hiss of a long public sigh of relief. (p. 370)

The people accept "the loss of their politics without demur" (p. 371). Moreover, as V.V.ji demonstrates through a parable, "we Indians are notoriously good at being resigned to our lot", (p. 371) like that man in the parable, a symbol of India, who falling from the wood-mice eaten branch of a tree under which a tiger is waiting for him, into a well full of hissing snakes, makes the best of his lot by licking up a gleaming drop of honey on a solitary blade of grass growing on the wall of the well and in the last moment of his life attempts to obviate by a drop of honey the deadly snake-venom about to be injected into him (pp. 371-72). The people of India similarly accept their lot without caring for what lies behind the delightful screen of the better work-ethic.

The Prime Minister ruled like a Goddess : black to liberal democrats, black to her political opponents. white to adoring impoverished *sansculottes* at rural public meetings, white also to contemplated corpulent capitalists. It was a complex spectrum of blacks, whites and fluid greys.

Brahminical ambivalence was therefore nothing to be ashamed of. (p. 368)

The novel in its ironic and irreverent tone, in its shifting of moods and its multivalent portrayal of the political scene seems to illustrate the Vedantic view put forth by Maharshi Vyas (not 'V.V.ji' of the novel) himself that the world is a 'Leela'⁹ of the divine principle. it seems to be a dance of verities. 'Dharma' is a spherical whole which can be viewed and interpreted from different angles. It is another discourse on unity in diversity:" it would seems from the newspapers that Indian life consists almost exclusively of a bewildering variety of forms of political behaviour" (p. 370). Perhaps it is this that makes Shashi Tharoor say:

I judged a degree of irreverence to be essential is the telling . . . I took heart from the conviction that irreverence in the Indian tradition is not sacrilege : the epics themselves ascribe human qualities, imperfections, base motives and feet of clay even to the gods. This prompted the humour, the puns and wordplay, the ironic tone of the book — all serving to say, "look this novel does not take itself too seriously, but it wants you to judge for yourself what you wish to take seriously from it."¹⁰

The novel is a powerful political statement in favour of both individual and national liberty, though at the deeper levels of man's personality it presents ambivalence. Dharma, as the novelist asserts, is multifaceted:

If there is a message to the book, it is two-fold. ... to reexamine all the received wisdom about India second, to do so through a reassertion of dharma, defined not just as religion but as the whole complex of values and standards — some derived from myth and tradition, some derived from our history by which India and Indians must live.¹¹

This 'Dharma', a complex of ambivalence, a prism of values and standards, which runs through our mythology and history, and though dissolved and diffused in our body politic, is sparkingly crystallized, primarily in its political dimensions, in Shashi Tharoor's portrayal of the Emergency, which represents a convergence of a vast mythological space into a few decades of modern history by means of an identification of a few years and characters as analogous to their mythical archetypes.

To sum up, in its portrayal of the Emergency through a tale of 'Dwapara' (an age of doubts and ambiguities), the novel's achievement is unique, for it demonstrates that though there are "multiple realities and multiple interpretations of reality",¹² 'Dharma', in all its connotations, is the bedrock which sustains mankind and any violation of it is bound to recoil on its perpetrator sooner or later, that both history and mythology, being creations of man's action and imagination, tend to run somewhat parallel to each other, that though the creation may be a 'Leela', the amusement it produces is 'the fine delight that fathers thought', for Tharoor's novels are "didactic ones masquerading as entertainment."¹³ It is amazing how his treatment of an extremely transitory historical event like the Emergency is loaded with so much profundity of reflection which may easily be missed because of its satirical and merry frolics through time and imagination.

References

1. John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 5-6.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

3. Shashi Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel* (New Delhi Penguin Books, 1989). All page references to the novel have been absorbed in the text of the paper without repeating the title.
4. Shashi Tharoor, *Show Business*, Penguin Books, New Delhi 1991.
5. Shashi Tharoor : 'Yoking of Myth to History', *Littcrit* (Vol. 16, No. 1 & 2, Dec. 1990) p. 7.
6. Shashi Tharoor, 'The Novel Entertains in order to Edify', *Littcrit* (Vol. 20, No. 2, Dec. 1994), p. 6.
7. Quoted by Kavita Nagpal in 'In Search of an Epic', *The Hindustan Times*, Magazine Section, 7 Oct. 2001.
8. Referred to by M.K. Naik in M.K. Naik & Shyamala A. Narayan, *Indian English Literature, 1980-2000*. (Delhi : Pencraft International, 2001), p. 211.
9. The concept of 'Leela' or Sport of the Creator as being at the root of creation is quite a popular one. Interestingly, it was codified by Maharshi Ved Vyas (the 'original' of 'V.V.ji' of the novel) in the words "Lokavattu leela kaivalyam" (i.e. the creation of the universe is the sport of God), *Vedanta Sutra*, Chapter. II, Sutra 33.
10. Shashi Tharoor, 'Yoking of Myth to History', *Littcrit*, Vol. 14, *Op. Cit.*, p.6.
11. *Ibid.*, p.8.
12. Shashi Tharoor, 'The Novel Entertains in Order to Edify', *Littcrit* (Vol. 20, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.
13. *Ibid.*, p.8.

O.V. Vijayan's *The Saga of Dharmapuri* : the Darkness and the Stars

It is a little surprising that O.V. Vijayan's *The Saga of Dharmapuri*¹ has been ignored in practically all the standard histories of Indian English literature though it is perhaps the only novel which deals with a highly meaningful theme, both of contemporary and universal relevance, through a novel means of attempting to create a repulsion for evil by employing erotic and even scatological devices producing what in Indian poetics is called '*Veebhatsa Rasa*' or, paradoxically, the pleasure arising from a display of repulsive objects, akin to '*Bhayanaka Rasa*', the horror, so popular in thrillers and mysteries.

Dharmapuri is the name of a real village where the repulsive practice of female foeticide was (and maybe, still is) common (*The Hindustan Times*, 29 September, 1994, p. 16). The novel was written earlier than this date, but it is quite possible that the author was aware of this heinous practice. The name Shantigram mentioned in the novel may have been inspired by Shantigram Ashram which was the Ashram of the novelist's Guru, as mentioned in the "Dedication" But at the same time a broad hint is given that it is the spiritual capital (Sevagram) of India, "Feringhee Empire", "freed colony", summing up "the spirit abroad in the new nation" where sages

resurrected the path of peace" (p. 15). The chronology is a little mixed up, for when Gandhi (the 'sage' of the novel) dwelt in Sevagram, India was a part of the 'Feringhee Empire'. But the novelist's hints seem to be clear enough to justify such an identification, for Dharmapuri has "no contender for the spiritual leadership of the world" (p. 15).

Though the novel was actually begun in 1972, its serialization started in 1977, in the March of which the Emergency was lifted and freedom of expression restored. It is highly probable that the portions referring to the Emergency ('Sate of Crisis' in the novel), with its citizens speaking "in terrified whispers of the enemy within" and readily surrendering their liberties to the state, were inserted during or after the Emergency. O.V. Vijayan said in an interview, "it was begun before the Emergency. But it was a portrayal of the events leading to the Emergency"². In fact it covers the Emergency also, for, as the novelist continues, "we had also a terribly inefficient tyranny, and an inefficient resistance"³, differentiating the Indian tyranny from the Latin American and the East European. The novelist pursues this identification mockingly for his own satirical purpose, using a number of narrative devices like fantasy, dream, black humour and irony. But what underlies most of them is *reductio ad absurdum*, mocking and belittling by incredible exaggeration, which is an important characteristic of the art of the cartoonist which Vijayan himself was. Sometimes the belittling is literal, as in the case of the President of the kingdom, an embodiment of the repulsive all-round decay. He is given an extraordinarily pitiable name '*Pippalada*' (p. 131) and is addressed by the visiting President of the white Confederacy (USA) as "Your Tiny Excellency" (p. 21). An enthroned destitute (p. 129) with the background of a

miserable childhood (pp. 136-137), his chief concerns are his colic and his concubines. He is naturally a weak despot who, in the absence of a promised "sorrow" (war) devises the stratagem of a feigned foreign invasion to ensure that his 'Great Crisis', the old zoo tiger, the gentle evil, stays on (p. 24). Addressed as "President-Vermin" by the "White Overlord" (President of USA) (p. 115) he later implores him to protect his state of crisis, even going to the extent of prostrating himself before the white man (p. 116). This dwarfish President may be said to resemble the ridiculous monarch in the cartoon strip "The Wizard of Id" by Brant Parker and Johnny Hart. The novel, in fact, seems to embody the darkness of evil by the creation of a myth, a cartoon network, which mocks through the strategy of exaggeration and repulsion caused by nauseating scatology, coarse and obscene eroticism and horrid cannibalism.

The dedication of the novel by Vijayan to his Guru, who persuaded him "to explore the concept of the teacher and incarnation" seems to provide the underlying inspiration for the novel. This appears to be confirmed by the brief nine-line Chapter I, in which "strange stars" from far away are said to be racing towards Dharmapuri to touch the earth only "one baptismal night" tangentially and whose "stellar presence" is sensed by the President of Dharmapuri resulting in his being gripped by a colic. This juxtaposition of the prophetic stars and the president's colic, as also the faintly suggested cycle of darkness and the stars, may be said to key up the springs of the novel.

The 'Dharmapuri' of the novel, an allegorical representation of both India and the world, is really 'Adharmapuri', engulfed in various shades of Darkness. It seems to have been intended to represent exaggeratedly and

fancifully the sinful ambience of the world in general and, in some of its political contours, of a certain extra-ordinary phase of post-independence Indian history, thus indirectly meant to convey “a deeper acceptance of what is right in the created world” (Author’s note).

The novelist seems to revel in scatology for its own sake though he suggests that “obscenity was rooted in the spirit itself”⁴. The President’s timings of defecation at sunrise and at sunset are fixed and the events are celebrated with the blowing of a conch and “solemnized by the broadcasting network” (p.11). The ‘Sovereign Excrement’ is treated as a Sacrament (‘prasad’), for little portions of it are mixed with food and consumed with veneration. There are a large number of scatological descriptions, perhaps the most repulsive one being that of a banquet given by the President of the White Confederacy (USA) at which all the members of the dynasty of the President of Dharmapuri on a state visit greedily satisfy their “militant appetites” (p.20) and, their patriarch not excepted, start opening the sluices of their bottoms till they were “wallowing in dung” and ultimately hunting “among gold and silverware for souvenirs” (p. 21). The stinging irony of the situation is sharply brought out when “sunk deep in food, wine and excrement, the President of Dharmapuri goes on” to assert that of their two countries his was the richer in tradition and wisdom” (p.21). Such descriptions, with their ‘black humour’ producing a smile at their highly unrealistic nature are akin to that of a fantasy or a fairy tale. Scatology becomes still more fantastic when the novelist attempts to relate it occasionally to the plot of the novel by the stability of the President’s excrement as an indication of the stability of his Presidency (p. 135) and an unusual hour of defecation as a premonition of some catastrophe, which, in any case, is true,

for at that very hour “an unusual traveller [Siddhartha] was crossing the mountains into Dharmapuri” (p. 14) for its redemption. Even the repulsive descriptions of defecation make the President not only pitiable but also ridiculous. Eroticism in the novel also plays a similar role. The President has hundreds of wives. Wives of soldiers too in the long periods of the absence of their husbands from them resort to lesbianism (pp. 49-50). The President too not only indulges in sex openly, but he is also a homo-sexual (p. 79). In fact, sex of all kinds, often bordering on obscenity from ‘august’ discharges accompanied with goat-cries (p.111) to sagging members (pp.127, 133, 134, etc.), Sex is spread over the novel, agonising both for the reader and the women involved (Chapter II), and sometimes for witnesses too like the kitchen-maid Lavannya’s son Sunanda (pp. 38 FF). As in the case of scatological descriptions, the erotic ones are also in some ways made to relate to the main theme, for the women as loyal citizen are committed to satisfy the lust of the men engaged in different duties. It is the traditional system, which is at fault. In fact, the repulsiveness of sex and violence — nudity, scatology and cannibalism scattered all over the novel — is a comment on the predominance of evil in social life making it a nightmare around which the political facets of the Emergency are woven. The novelist perceptively points out that “The grotesquely revealed sexuality of power serves an anti-erotic function”.⁵ Like scatology and cannibalism, it creates a repulsion against tyranny itself.

A frightful depth of darkness in the state of Dharmapuri is veiled cannibalism, the idea of which might possibly have come from Swift’s famous satire *A Modest Proposal*, the sharp underpinning of which also is political. Dharmapuri, along with the Sovereign Excrement. Another

'non-veg' admixture which enhances the delicacies of the Royal dinning table, is the flesh of human beings, preferably the soft one of the children — "flavoursome food, human flesh dressed as sunflower and fruit" (p.134) while their "brown mothers" are "crying for children—who had become meat". (p.134) Men even sell their children and paralysed parents to be converted into meat (p.101). Moreover, children's flesh is exported and earns foreign exchange. In these ways cannibalism and war have been integrated with patriotic duties. The cannibalistic admixture in food also acts as a powerful aphrodisiac as in the case of a white woman:

The seduction on the tongue grew frantic; she closed her eyes, and in despair and pleasure, like virgin sinning, swallowed her first mouthful. Another mouthful, and yet another; now she was crying and eating off the tray the flesh of humans from the black and brown condiments, processed by the alchemists and transformed into peacable fruit and flower. She cried out deliriously, "Hold me, my husband!" (p. 139)

Paraashara's in his swoon witnesses a workhouse for killing the brown children like Sunanda tied on a belt for being converted into meat:

A vision vivid to him in his sleep, he saw his passing and his recurrence. His body had changed and was food. Around the food sat a man, a woman and a girl of tender age, her eyes blue and innocent and her cheeks fair as the mountain snow. Sunanda communed with the girl: *Fair one, my elements come to life again inside you. Brother, she said, I receive you into me.* Said Sunanda, *Fair one this is our new and everlasting covenant.* The conveyor belt now moved faster. Sunanda woke from his stupor, just once did he cry out for his father and mother; as the cold

blades of the saw raced towards him, he said,
Merciful sister, here I come (pp. 158-547).

All these scatological, erotic and cannibalistic displays are only symptoms, with the cartoonist's wild exaggerations of a reality of the underlying decay of the political system leading to misguided patriotism expressed so repulsively.

The subsistence of a festering political system is the main theme of the novel in the definition of the parameters of which the ambience of the Indian Emergency plays a substantial role. The President, "well pleased with the rising numbers of the dynasty" (p. 20) is worried about the future of its members if an election is held due to the influence of the White Confederacy (USA), "what will happen if we are faced to go to the polls and the convention of the Holy Spirit is beaten?" (p. 21). Indira Gandhi's fear of resigning after the court verdict and not being re-elected seems to be parodied in the President's terror at the prospect voiced by his Ministers: "The Confederate warehouses will take back the limousines and the blonde women from the Young Excellencies and withhold the supplies of candy." The President fears, "O they will sack my children, they will sack them all!" (p. 22). The Ministers suggest a 'Proclamation' and "The President bent forward and crowed, and out came a turd as big as a sewer rat; and with that was promulgated the "State of Crisis" (p. 22). This allegorical parody of the Emergency continues with the President's midnight broadcast (paralleling Indira Gandhi's midnight call upon the President). "My beloved people, give me your freedoms, henceforth let them be hidden inside me, because it is to rob you of them that the insidious enemy has penetrated us" (p. 23) which with "colourful stamps of the President squatting among heaps of carrot and lettuce, munching on the vegetables" "reinforced the people's faith in

their pacific Presidency" (p. 23). *Prava*, obviously a variation of *Pravda*, forcefully supports the State of Crisis for having done away with the *Law of Habeas Corpus* and "the Communards [i.e. Communists] of Dharmapuri welcomed these abridgements of rights with a fervour" recalling the Great Tartar Purges [Russian Revolution] and rejoiced in the comparison (p. 23). The novelist's own reaction brings out the mood of the people in general: "The Crisis had come to stay, gently fearsome like the tiger in the neighbourhood zoo" (p. 23). Moreover, the people were made to fear an invasion for the Confederate armada which had come stealthily in the sight not to invade but to disgorge rotten wheat for the people and candy for the Palace (p. 24).

As in the Emergency, euphemistic expressions conceal the grim reality. The Minister of War is called the 'Minister of Sorrowing', the wars are 'Sorrows', sometimes nuclear Sorrows, the soldiers are 'Persuaders'. There is a marginal similarity between the 'power tableau' of this novel and that of the Emergency in which everybody including the Ministers and the common people cringe before the President even glorifying in the novel his ridiculous and contemptuous ways of life. What a reflection on the state of crisis (the Emergency) that such a ruler can control not only the executive and the army, reduce the legislature to non-existence but also make the judiciary committed and pliant to his will! The judge confesses helplessly, "What am I, a mere judge before the wisdom of the people? I am nothing more than the instrument of their will" (pp. 109-110), for he is bound to commit a mere child of ten to death knowing that he is falsely charged with treason. In fact, "the love of one's country demands the killing of children" (p. 110) to pander to their perverted culinary tastes and to export their flesh to earn

foreign exchange. What a travesty of the Emergency's committed judiciary! But a pointer it is to "the eunuch voice of history." (p.110)

Like the 'Big Brother' of Huxley's *Brave New World*, the spies of foreign powers are everywhere, though like the Narsimha of the Hindu mythology they are hidden inside pillars (pp. 114-15). The spies are from both of the great powers of the world – the Red Tartar Republic (USSR) and the white Confederacy (USA) whose spying organisation is the Confederacy (USA) whose spying organisation is the Confederate Intelligence Agency (CIA). The President maintains relations with both the great powers who cover the news of Dharmapuri in their newspapers '*Prava*', (i.e. *Pravda*) and *Wild West Times* (i.e. *New York Times*); though a small notice in the latter is prized more than a whole supplement of the former (pp.13). In spite of Dharmapuri's professed "creed of neutrality" (p.115), there is a marked tilt towards the Tartar Republic (USSR), and the communards (communists) enthusiastically welcome the proclamation of the State of Crisis, as also their own imprisonment, if any takes place (p.23). In addition, there is also Samarkhand (Pakistan), "a decolonized principality bordering Dharmapuri" and "a client of imperialism" which is, as its Prime Minister says, going to conclude "a treaty of war with our great neighbour, Dharmapuri" (p. 66). This it is going to do because a Confederate (American) trading house in Samarkhand had dismissed the most favourite concubine of the Prime Minister of Samarkhand, and so the 'treaty of war' with Dharmapuri (India), a close ally of the Tartar Republic, is its way of showing its displeasure with the Republic. The concubines with their "geo-political consequence" (p. 66) are often the repositories of matters of state, and the Prime

Minister confides in one of his concubines that his wife, the Begum, had gone to bed with a Confederate (American) credit agency so as to be able to get the credit for buying bales of silks and kegs of wine coming in its cargo, thus making Samarkhand a pimp of The White Confederacy:

The vision of her nation as a pimp, its armed legions and its flying machines and flotillas, its spies and prosecutors and judges, its convocations, protocols and glittering ceremony, all the many arms of a pimp god, made the concubine sad." (p. 69)

On the side of Dharmapuri are shown its citizens listening to a journalist about the new 'Sorrow' (war) with Samarkhand:

There is a new imperialist conspiracy against Dharmapuri, but we will launch a Sorrow against Samarkhand to pre-empt it. Our persuaders will deal with the external adversary, but we need more secret policemen to defeat the enemy within" (p. 71)

The projected 'Sorrow' is going to include crossing the boundary, shooting, occupation and, of course, rape which will be filmed for analysis by the leaders. But children's voices chanting of the doggerel of innocence rise above the din of battle and make at least one of the citizens cry that he does not want to prepare for the 'Sorrow' but to seat his child on his lap. This is a fitting commentary on the international political scenario in which dictators sometimes fight and strengthen espionage to defeat the enemy within." (p. 71) They fight wars to keep themselves in power but cannot suppress the voice of humanity.

Having analysed the 'Darkness' of which the Emergency is a part, we come to the 'Stars' which is the title of Chapter I of the novel providing the key to its

understanding and is repeated in the title of the chapter XVII ('The Stars Set') showing the death of what is Good. Siddhartha, the Bodhisatva, makes his appearance again and again giving the reader a hope that ultimately the Good, the Stars, will triumph. O.V. Vijayan reveals how Siddhartha was introduced into the novel. He says,

"The ridiculous aspect is present upto a point. Therefore the Indian mind, the mind of the enunciate comes into play,... . That is why I introduced the Bodhisatva as a hero".

According to the *Gita* the Divine incarnates himself whenever evil begins to dominate. But there is an obverse side also to it — the repeated recurrence of evil. Siddhartha arrives finally in an attempt to direct mankind towards peace, but is lead up stairs after stairs only to find in the uppermost storey a "decrepit thing" clinging to the arches of the cupola and shredding "the aging chronicles of the earth":

This then was the keeper of the riddle of war, this misshappen gene that sat over the clans and races of man... . Darkness thickened in the bowl of the Cupola and hid the beast. Now comes the answer that he had hoped would unlock the secret that moved the crimes and sovereigns in an echo that swirled out of the cupola like a hollow and insane mind, 'Ooooooh'

Siddhartha turned away from that demonic void and began his toilsome journey of return, a great sadness upon him, a pure and tender despair and pursuing him down the interminable spiral that bored its way back to the earth and was the echo of the cupola." (p. 154)

The secret is that there is something in the genes of man which pushes him towards war, towards evil. And so Paraashara realizes that "Defeat awaits the one that follows

the Seer.” (p. 56) Because of the Gene initially implanted in man, this is ‘Leela’, the play of the Great Delusion, “The fond play of the Manifest God” which seers like Christ have to suffer as “atonement for the sins of God” (p. 157) What Omar Khayyam in his *Rubaiyat*, as translated by Fitzgerald, wrote:

Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didnt make,
And who with Eden didnt devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give — and take!
(Stanza no. 58)

Because God has planned this ‘Leela’, this sport, the cycle energized by the evil Gene and attempted to be broken by “disconsolate Avatars” (p.158) has to go on along with the individuals greed for power giving rise to some form of Emergency over and over again somewhere or the other. Paraashara sees that “the sun had set and had risen and was setting”.... The weapon slung over his shoulder lay quiet like a child that had cried itself to sleep (p.154).

A vast gulf of darkness, of which the perversions of politics are a major part, is bound to recur on the Jahnvi following timelessly, and we have to acquiesce in the rules of the Divine Sport. The end of the novel makes one deeply introspective. Weapons have not been able to break the cycle of the reappearance of darkness after every sunrise. Perhaps the answer lies in Siddhartha's message of love conveyed through his long and close embrace of Paraashara while “his love flowed over the soldier in great tides” (p. 158). And Paraashara's knocking before the “resplendent and miraculous” *pipal* tree, the embodiment of Siddhartha, and his embrace of the responding tree. The sin of the Beast, the initial Gene and its explosions in the wars and Emergencies can only be overpowered by love that knows no bounds —

this alone is the panacea for all the ills and evils of mankind. Through his satirically, even ridiculously, exaggerated portrayal of the sinister and repulsive atmosphere of the Emergency, Vijayan has effectively, though subtly, voiced this eternal message the universality of which is born out both by science and politics. The novel has universal dimension like the "existential angst", though modified by "the Hindu dimension of rebirth", "The victory of oriental culture over the technocratized and over-sophisticated western civilization",⁶ though politics seems to provide the spring-board.

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Arun Joshi's *The City and the River*: Emergency and the Cosmic Perspective

Myths are often the storehouses of universal truths. The present age has been called the "Mythical Age"¹ in which writers tend to use myths not only as "a structural organizing principle of literary form",² but also make them in whole or in parts as contextual creations for their discourses on fragments of reality, thus attempting to reach out to their essence. In his last novel *The City and the River*³ Arun Joshi seems to attempt both these objectives. In his earlier novels he had created protagonists who transcend the materialistic into a web of reflections and dilemmas⁴. But in *The City and the River*, operating on a much vaster canvas of space and time, he aims at articulating much more fundamental affirmations through mythic-cum-allegorical strategy. The twin realities, both worldly and divine, seem to reinforce each other.

Arun Joshi died when he appeared to be passing from a direct portrayal of men and society to allegory, fantasy, prophecy and multilateral experimentation with the theme of time and its recurrence through *Srishti* and *Pralaya* in *The City and the River*, and thus attaining greater maturity, referred to by M.K. Naik.⁵ This was what Arun Joshi seems to be striving for in his novels which orchestrate a variety of approaches towards a comprehensive and affirmative vision. In one of his rare statements about his own work, Arun Joshi says that his novels are "essentially attempts towards a better

understanding of the world and of myself."⁶ He also confirms the influence of an existential thinker like Camus on one hand and of Gandhi and the *Gita* on the other. Much of the criticism on Arun Joshi, however, tends to be somewhat obsessed with the 'existential' aspects of his work, without sufficiently noticing its obverse side, "the religious issues — the problems of an essentially Hindu mind",⁷ converting the challenge of reality into a vision and a prophecy.

The narrative framework of the novel is mythical, like that of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in which there is a third-person narrator, different from the author and while playing a significant role in his own narrative, gives it a proper beginning and an end. The Great Yogeshwara narrates the concluding events of the last cycle to the Nameless-One being sent as another Hermit of the Mountain into a world similar to that of the novel. In the end of the last cycle, which is delineated in the novel lies the beginning of a new one, like a snake eating its own tail. The city which has been disintegrated is the microcosm of this world which can also improve and attain perfection by the repetitive cycle being converted into a spiral. Then alone this "endless repetition" (p. 262) will stop. The initiative, however, lies with man alone, with the Great Yogeshwara as the helpful director, airily enjoying the play of successive 'Grand Masters ruling in their own successive worlds.

The world of the previous cycle has recognizably contemporary motifs — not only cigars, newspapers, lottery-stalls, card-clubs and gunboats but also self-loading rifles tanks, helicopters, conveyors run on electricity and even radio-waves and lasers. At the same time there are objects like the pyramids (p. 12) and the Seven Hills (p. 12) that remind us of the ancient world, but they co-exist with a neighboring

mountain and its snow-covered peaks, a dome, a marvel of modern architecture and structures of steel and glass — a “panorama of brown and pink and white” (p. 12), a deep and mighty river. Yet in spite of the river, there are no gardens, except perhaps the one in which a Professor’s flowers grow. The presence of certain objects and the absence of others makes the backdrop not only timeless but also points to its lack of fecundity and an over-all dearth of a meaningful value-system, as in Eliot’s *The Wasteland*. The stage on which the events of the novel happen is projected as the world in miniature, dominated by evil which brings about its annihilation.

That evil is chiefly embodied in the delineation of the Indian political scenario of the Emergency which largely forms the core of the framework of the novel’s space and time. Raising the hobgoblin of threats from without and within (p. 21), the Grand Master, who is the ruler of the country, declares an “Era of Ultimate Greatness” (p. 23) and its “ways of the Three Beautitudes” or “Triple Way” (p. 177-178) which are similar to the Emergency and the Twenty-Point Programme. The rest follows naturally. There is an unalloyed dictatorship, though with a facade of democracy. In place of an elected legislature there is an Advisory Council (p. 13), as in The Emergency too the legislature had become ineffective and The Prime Minister was guided by a small coterie which in the novel ‘elects’ The Grand Master. The “New Era” (p. 22), has many features of the Indian Emergency — absence of judiciary (which in the case of The Emergency was a ‘committed judiciary’), strict control of the media including the satellite (pp. 88, 109-10, 173) and of “cheerleaders” in the Rallies organised by a “Rallies Master” (pp. 37-38, 99-100). The Grand Master wants to become the

King, not only to perpetuate and increase his powers but also to make the office automatically hereditary, ensuring his son's easy succession. The army, as represented by General Starch, is interested in a share of the booty. In fact, money power is the only reality (p. 90), and bribery (pp. 176, 191-196), hoarding and adulteration like that of oil (p. 152) are rampant. The Boatmen are given articles of inferior quality (p. 64). Even air is privately owned (pp. 122-23). There is an attempt at a whimsical and stupid straightening of roads by the use of bulldozers and the consequent creation of what comes to be called Avenue Asthough (p. 137) where the people displaced by the razing down of their houses live and carry on their normal activities as though their demolished houses are still there. An impractical family-planning programme carried to extreme limits, naturally arouses great resentment among the people, especially as few can understand the implications of the order: "Only one child to a mother and two to a home" (p. 18). There is suppressed anger among the people, especially among the students and teachers (pp. 45, 52-54, 58, 87). *The City and the River*, both nameless, may be said to stand respectively for the ephemeral and the eternal, the artificial and the primitive, materialistic civilization and the natural way of life. Between these two poles of the 'civilized' city-dwellers and the primitivistic Boatman, headed respectively by the Grand Master and the Headman (at present a woman) there are a few Brickmen, who are really brinkmen, representing the middle class owing a pragmatic allegiance to the Grand Master. The Boatmen who worship the River as the symbol of the Divine, of God Himself, refuse to take the oath of allegiance to any man and stick to their traditions and customs.

This leads to cruel and ruthless repression in which many of the Boatmen are killed or imprisoned including their Headman, who by uniting the male and female principles becomes a divine instrument. These acts of suppression and torture including the blinding of the Headman remind us not only of the Emergency but also of incidents like Jallianwalla Bagh, the French Revolution and the Communist rule in the erstwhile Soviet Union and in China. The army's demanding a share in power and booty may perhaps remind us of the situation in Pakistan. In any case, the rebellion and its suppression constitute a universal paradigm which very much includes the Emergency. In addition, the resentment of the common people is reflected in their recitation of the parables of the king clothed in imaginary finery (p.124) and of the mirrors reflecting reality (pp. 135-35), as the portrait does in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. To combat the revolt of the Boatmen led by the 'Headman', the Professor and Bhumi Putra (or Master Bhoma), the Grand Master loosens a reign of terror with night-arrests (called "night work", p. 24) with quotas of such arrests fixed for each police officer (pp. 112ff, 118ff), and the prisoners, including Patanjali, are put without trial in the 'Gold Mines', a euphemistic expression for a labyrinthine prison which probably was once a gold mine. Because of the long time for which no trials were held, the officers have forgotten how to frame charges, and when to improve his image the Grand Master orders the release of innocent prisoners, it is the prisoners who are asked to prove their innocence.

The novel is neither a book of history, nor an unalloyed satirical portrait of the Emergency. But it does transcreate its atmosphere. To accuse the novelist of "a certain clumsiness in the handling of political allegory"⁸, would thus

hardly be fair to him, for he is attempting not to write another *MacFlecknoe* but to distil the essence of reality. The novel is the sharpest indictment of the Emergency from a cosmic perspective — Emergency as Evil pitted against the Good, “parable of the times”,⁹ the mainspring of which are provided by concepts beyond the contemporary.

The old prophecy, placed prominently as the epigraph of the novel, is perhaps central to the understanding of its thematic content. It reads as under:

Who knows, who can read the signs,
The working of immortal time?
A king I see upon the throne,
In astronomer's grove the boatmen mourn.
A thing of darkness growing dark,
On city walls the shadow's mark.
The river I see, from a teacher rise.
Under a rain the waters burn,
To his kingdom at last the king returns.¹⁰

The third and fourth lines of the prophecy point to the contrasts and conflicts between the despotic king and his men on the one hand and the suffering boatmen on the other, leading to the annihilation of the old order and preparation of the ground ultimately for the coming of a King, presumably of the right kind.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth lines point to the oppression of the good and the traditional at the hands of a ruthless and evil King who is shown as a “thing of darkness” casting its shadows even on the walls of the city. The seventh, eighth and ninth lines only portray graphically and paradoxically, a method so common in prophecies like those

of Nostradamus, the nemesis visiting the evil order with a sort of '*pralaya*' (total annihilation) so that a new *srishti* (a new order) may come into being. The whole chain of events is explained in the first two lines read with the last. The novelist himself makes his stance fairly clear through the mouth of the Hermit of the Mountain who says:

I beg you to pay attention: there is nothing inevitable about the prophecy. The hand that made it believes, above all, in man's capacity to change his fate. So even if it speaks of the coming of a king, men can so conduct themselves, so choose, that the king does not come. Or the king that comes is of the right kind. (p. 68)

The apparent contradiction between free will and pre-determination is resolved by the hermit in another way somewhat resembling the concept of will in Nietzsche's *The World as Will and Idea*:

And it is He who is the master of all men including the Great Master, and it is His will that men follow in every way. ... But the Almighty can manifest through men only what men allow Him to manifest. That is why men and cities and nations must choose. (p. 156)

As can be deduced from the words of the Hermit quoted above, man has the capacity to change his fate and any upliftment of society must start at the level of the individual and his efforts at self-purification, the shedding of "Egoism, selfishness stupidity" (p. 263). The reference in the prophecy to the coming of the King of the right kind "at last" may be a reference to the ultimate return of spiritual values to a materialistic society. And once the world has purified itself, the "endless repetition", "the periodic disintegration will be prevented and a stable society, a Gandhian Ramrajya or a Christian Kingdom of God will be established. This message

of the salvation of mankind is embodied in characters like the Hermit, Bhumiputra, the Professor and the Headman as also in the Boatmen's non-violent refusal to take the oath of allegiance to the Grand Master. This highlights the centrality of individual effort at self-purification and attempt to convert the hearts of the opponents through determined but non-aggressive resistance, and so has strong Gandhian overtones unmistakably suggested in the Hermit's world to be the Grand "A man aspiring to rule this city must first learn to be the slave of this city." (p. 113).

Another source of the affirmations of this novel is the *Gita* which had influenced Joshi's earlier work too. The one who watches the recurrence of this cycle, Leela, this 'charade' or "joke" (p. 262) is Yogeshwara, obviously named after the appellation given to Lord Krishna in the concluding shloka of the *Gita*. The recurrence of the cycle of the rise of evil and its ultimate destruction is suggestive of its famous shloka (IV.7) referring to the divine incarnation whenever righteousness decays.

Moreover, the similarity of the concluding passage of the novel in which the Great Yogeshwara provides some enlightenment to the hesitant Nameless - One being sent into a new cycle with Krishna's advice to Arjuna before the battle of *Mahabharata* is notable. In fact, a cosmic vision, which is close to that of the *Gita* envelopes the novel. The *Gita* speaks of the brevity of human life and eternity of the soul — man being constantly born and dying (*The Gita* II, 26, 28) and Master Bhoma in the novel inspires the Boatmen with a similar message:

The guns can kill your bodies. Yes, are you, then afraid to die ? What is man, howsoever powerful, that he so fills you with dread, thus you

let him come between you and your understanding. What is a Grand Master if not a wisp of the morning mist that for a moment dances upon the river's deep waters. (p. 146)

Another aspect of the theme of the novel is Time and its inexorable movement hinted. The narrator refers to the pronouncement of a certain sage to a king in the past:

Celebrate Time which alone is immortal. Let the Election remind you and your subjects of your mortality and the mortality of all men". And the sage told him to worship the great river which was Times's consort and Time itself. (pp. 60-61)

There is a Parrot who apparently dies in one cycle but in the next one the cry of a bird (presumably of the parrot itself) is heard every now and then (p. 262). Does he embody the over-seeing and ever-seeing spirit of 'The great God in the highest heaven?' (p. 264)

As important as all these factors are the haunting notes of music and dance that are noticed at most of the crucial moments of destruction and reconstruction as also occasionally to give other indications. The despotic Grand Master, naturally hates the notes of the boatmen's melody that he thinks he has heard before as coming "from afar, from a spaceship, perhaps, or a dying star" (p. 203). And yet he is drawn to it, he who hates music and hears within its music the "tones of a mocking laugh" (p. 205). Thus the taste for divine music is the touchstone of the wavelength of a person's attitude towards good and evil. Similarly, in the night in which the Nameless-One is going to leave for the new world, he hears the sound of music which is a sign that he is in tune with the cosmic forces (p. 11)

At the actual moment of his departure also the Nameless-One hears "the same haunting melody of the previous night" which had such an "utter sweetness" that he was "certain that a god was descending", and which "was so close that he thought he could surely hug it to his chest" (p. 264). All these references to music and dancing have a wide range of suggestivity including the lute of Lord Krishna, the dance of Shiva and the all-enveloping music of the spheres. These and other aspects of the novel make him transcend the contemporary into the cosmic, the transient into the timeless.

The universe itself is a part of the divine 'leela', like a child breaking his sand dunes and rebuilding them. Thus man and his desires are bound to end in only one way — the extinction of the wasteland of evil by Good. The Indian Emergency in the novel is but like the painter's model for the so called 'Era of ultimate Greatness'. It is but a microcosm of evil in the universe hopefully moving towards its consummation in mankind's spiritual refulgence. The duality of the 'City' and the 'River' is finally resolved in the comforting promise of a new creation.

In *The City and the River*, seeking the meaning of existence, almost in Shelley's immortal cry "O World! O Life! O Time!" ('A Lament'), Arun Joshi, with a sad irony, was himself like Shelley, unknowingly climbing its "last steps", and the novel soon proved to be his last and the most meaningful work trying to explore the mystery of World, Life and Time through an allegorical tale largely deriving its material from a brief but unfortunate period of post-independence Indian history.

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10. Given as an epigraph in the novel.

The Emergency in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*: Weights and Counterweights

As the title of the book itself indicates, Rohinton Mistry puts the Emergency in his fine balance and tries objectively to weigh it through a variety of weights and counterweights. This challenging subject has unfortunately been addressed seriously by only a few of the reputed novelists. In his *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie has with his sophisticated and significant irony symbolized a few of the facets of the Emergency through two of his characters

one fictitious (Adam Aziz with large ears but a frozen tongue) and the other real (Indira Gandhi with particoloured hair like the two sides of the Emergency, good and bad). Shashi Tharoor in his *The Great Indian Novel* has tried his best to interpret contemporary history of India through the Mahabharat myth and has consequently made a difficult, and not quite successful, attempt to squeeze the Emergency into it by portraying it as the well-known game of dice, ignoring the dark details of the period except only the attempted disrobing of D.Mokrasi (Democracy) without going into its numerous ramifications, and by making the great battle of Kurukshetra closely follow it, practically skipping over the thirteen eventful years of 'Vanavas' and 'Agyatvaas'. It is in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* that we are given insights into the psyche of major characters like Sonali trapped within

the nauseating atmosphere and gruesome crimes of the period with a high degree of perceptive sensitivity.

To pass on to Rohinton Mistry's celebrated novel *A Fine Balance*¹, a winner of the Commonwealth Prize and of the Canadian Giller's Award, is like coming out into the open and wide sunlit world of contemporary Indian life with all its historical, sociological and political ambience. The achievement is all the more remarkable for a writer of the Indian diaspora, the only one of this class to handle this subject, who must have put in a great deal of labour to acquire all the relevant information. We get a knowledge of the historical perspective through the recollections of Dina Dalal who was presumably born in the later thirties. Through her we come to know about the Civil Disobedience Movement, communal riots, Partition, Language Riots, etc. The novelist himself during the course of his narration provides us with the sociological background, the rigidity of the caste system, leading to the excesses committed, especially by Thakurs on the Chamaars, their untold humiliations and occasional deaths. The bright side of rural life is the general amity and brotherhood prevailing among the Hindus and the Muslims, only occasionally disturbed by communal riots when the members of one community save the lives of those of the other even at great personal risk. The poverty of the village leads some of the younger ones to migrate to the cities where they have to face all sorts of difficulties in finding accommodation even in unauthorized slums and in finding jobs. Sometimes they have to sleep on pavements or railway platforms.

Though rich in sociological details, the novel is "intensely political"². As the novelist said in an interview, its central theme is the Emergency:

In *Such a Long Journey*, the year is 1971. It seemed to me that 1975, the year of the Emergency, would be the next important year, if one were preparing a list of important dates in Indian history. And so 1975 it was³.

The beginning of this most horrifying and shameful period in modern Indian history in the novel is so sudden that the characters cannot quite comprehend what it really means. Some of them think that it is merely a "government tamasha" (p. 5). It is only with the passage of time that its ghastly reality slowly percolates into their consciousness as the novelist goes on piling one ugly detail upon another. Initially, some of the people, especially those living in comfort, were happy at improvement in punctuality (p. 78), the instilling of a sense of discipline in the nation (p. 180) through measures like checking of ticketless travelling (pp.282-83), improvement in industrial relations due to the fear of the police (p.373), etc. Nusswan Dalal thinks that all these measures are necessary, for "to make a democratic omelette you have to break a few democratic eggs" (p. 372) to which Maneck Kohlah thinks out a reply, "A democratic omelette is not possible from eggs bearing democratic labels but laid by the tyrannical hen." (p. 373) The managing director of a multinational, as reported by Nusswan, has gone to the extent of suggesting the elimination of at least two hundred million people, who "sit in the gutter and look like corpses" (p. 373) by giving them a free meal containing arsenic or cyanide." (p. 373). Such "bizarre aphorisms" (p. 373) are uttered only by the rich enjoying every comfort of life, who, like Mrs. Gupta, think that "The Emergency is a good medicine for the nation", (p. 352). But even among their friends quite a few like Maneck Kohlah and Mrs. Dalal maintain their sanity. Dina Dalal wonders: "if Mrs. Gupta had taken up writing slogans

for the Emergency, as a sideline or hobby. Or perhaps she had suffered an overdose of the Government's banners and posters, and lost the capacity for normal speech" (p. 352). The views of the rich are balanced by the actual sufferings of the masses symbolised in the preparation of 'shish kebab' with chunks of lamb and liver on the brazier placed over the burning coals:

How they glowed, thought Maneck – live creatures breathing and pulsating. Starting small, with modest heat, then growing to powerful red incandescence, spitting and snapping their tongues of flame crackling, all heat and passion, transforming threatening, devouring. And then – the subsidence. Into mellow warmth, compliance, and, finally, a perfect stillness.... (p. 610)

It is a graphic picture of a mass revolution beginning, reaching its climax and lastly being completely suppressed. This is what could have happened during the Emergency. But it did not happen, at least not to that extent. The cancer of corruption and criminalization of politics, which had already been eating into the vitals of the nation, flares up in the Emergency and spreads its tentacles far and wide, often with a nod of official approval. In fact, as a character observes, 'The Indian society is decaying from top downwards' (p. 561). The roots of the Emergency lay in the effort to subvert the law and to retain power through wrong and illegal means. Quickly narrating the early events of the period, Avinash, a student leader, says:

Under the pretext of Emergency, fundamental rights have been suspended, most of the opposition is under arrest, union leaders are in jail, and even some student leaders..... But the worst thing is, the press is being censored... And

she has retroactively changed the election laws
turning her guilt into innocence. (p. 245)

This is just the beginning. Worse is still to follow. The hoardings of Indira Gandhi and the paintings of Government slogans are just the outer trappings which cannot deceive the people. A campaign with a euphemistic name, 'City Beautification Scheme', actually results in the bulldozing of the slums and forcing the roofless poor to pass their nights on pavements or railway platforms, carrying, like Ishwar and Om, their things in boxes or bundles every day to their places of work. When a party worker tells this to men and women standing in a queue for collecting water from a tap, the reaction is interesting:

'The Prime Ministers' message is that she is your servant, and wants to help you. She wants to hear things from your own lips,

Tell her yourself', someone shouted. 'You can see in what prosperity we live!'

'Yes! Tell her how happy we are! Why do we need to come?

'If she is our servant, tell her to come here!

'Ask your men with the cameras to pull some photos of our lovely houses, our healthy children! Show that to the Prime Minister!'" (p. 258)

But in spite of their protests the people are forced, wherever necessary with caning and slapping, to board the buses taking them to a Rally where they get very meager payment, practically starve for the whole day and also lose their day's earning in the bargain. Such incidents, which are by no means isolated, create a sense of disillusionment and

disaffection among the masses. This is really forced labour for which practically no payment is made. There are other camps also to which the people are taken by force, where family planning operations could be held under the guise of free medical check-ups. In such camps bachelors or even people about to be married are operated upon, sometimes even castrated at the instance of powerful people. Quite a few of these men and women die of infections caused by semi-sterilised instruments. Ishwar develops gangrene of both legs which have to be amputated.

The lives of all major characters of the novel are blighted by the Emergency. It leaves Maneck Kohlah crushed under the wheels of a fast suburban train with Avinash's chess set in his hands. Dina Dalal, prematurely old and purblind, slaves her years out in the house of her brother. And the two poor tailors struggling only for a livelihood are utterly crushed – Ishwar, with stumps in place of legs, is driven by his young but castrated nephew Omprakash, a big full-stop having so bluntly converted their heroic struggle for a living into begging on the streets for small charities, 'sperectomized', drained of all hope, till death comes mercifully to release them from this burden called life. Lest we feel that the novelist has exaggerated the sufferings of the people and made them too pathetic, he has put a few lines from Balzac as an epigraph of the novel to assure us of its essential truth:

'Holding this book in your hand, sinking back in your soft arm-chair, you will say to yourself: perhaps it will amuse me. And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensivity, accusing him of wild

exaggeration and flights of fancy. But rest assured: this tragedy is not a fiction. All is true.'

The novelist has described the consequential working out of the Emergency so effectively that we whole-heartedly agree with what Vasantrya Valmik, a briefless lawyer, whose conscience breaks out in high-flown language full of poetic allusions, quotes his favourite poet:

I'm inspired by the poet Yeats. I find his words especially relevant during this shameful Emergency. You know — things falling apart, centre not holding, anarchy loosed upon the world, and all that sort of thing." (p. 566)

But earlier, 'Valmik, while feeling that anger was necessary to "force the politicians to behave properly" (p. 229), had in his normal mood spoken some words of true wisdom crystallized in the title of the novel itself, "you have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair... In the end it is all a question of balance." (p. 231)

The author appears to have overloaded one pan of his balance with despair, but there is much in the other pan also which is of great value. The Emergency is not an isolated case of tyrannous rule in India. Events like J.P.'s Civil Disobedience movement of 1975 have also been referred to in the novel. Dina Dalal's reminiscences go back into history recalling a long chain of events. She does not remember the Quit India Movement of 1942 because she was too young, but the horrors of Partition she does remember, and the novelist implies that the Emergency horrors were no match to them. At the personal level too, the murder of Avinash during the Emergency is matched by the suicide of his three sisters after the Emergency, for their father had no money for their dowry

(p. 594). The novelist drives home the point that in individual life the lifting of the Emergency has made little difference:

Of course, for ordinary people, nothing has changed. Government still keeps breaking poor people's homes and jhopadpattis. In villages, they say they will dig wells only if so many sterilizations are made. They tell farmers they will get fertilizer only after nussbandi is performed. Living each day is to face one emergency or another. (p. 581)

Maneck's glancing through old newspapers after his return makes him feel the same:

After a while even the pictures looked the same: train derailment, monsoon floods, bridge collapse; ministers being garlanded, ministers making speeches; ministers visiting areas of natural and man-made disasters. (p. 593)

He also learns about the suicide of the three sisters of Avinash (who had already lost his life during the Emergency) for their father could not arrange for their dowry (p. 594). The Anti-Sikh Riots too which killed thousands of innocent people (pp. 580 f.f) outbalance the Emergency. Moreover, the major characters, three-dimensionally portrayed, and the minor ones, with their individual characteristics and whimsicalities, draw the reader's attention to themselves, making us forget, at least for some time, the Emergency and the suffering it has imposed upon them and others. The two tailors with their robust instinct for survival, the deep affection that suffuses their beings and their sense of humour are unforgettable. The novelist himself points out:

The way the main characters the tailors, Ishwar and Omprakash, endure suggests that dignity is inherent in the heroic manner in which they

strive to survive. And perhaps in their irrepressible sense of humour⁴.

Bearing the non-denominational, but supremely religious, names of Ishwar and Om, they seem unconsciously to enshrine the ancient wisdom that it is all 'Leela', a play or a joke, which we should all accept gladly whatever roles are assigned to us. The two tailors have to suffer all their lives, but they never complain or protest and make Dina Dalal laugh every day (p. 614). And even in the penultimate stage of their earthly existence, mutilated into helplessness, dependent on small charities that they get as beggars, having no thought of the past or the future, cracking jokes, they have cheerfully put themselves in the hands of God. They legless Ishwar in his hand-driven cart made to move on small castors, sits good-humourably on a patchwork quilt not only reminiscent of his own life as well as of Life itself. The novelist had already emphasized in an earlier chapter (pp. 489-91) the idea of life as one patchwork quilt with God as 'Quiltmaster' (p. 491). The patchwork quilt has been treated as a multiple symbol — as an incomprehensible pattern of the various spots of time (as in Rachel Lyman Field's famous one-act play *The Patchwork Quilt*⁵) and as an all-inclusive pattern of Life in which "the whole quilt is much more important than any single square." (p. 490). In the endlessly continuing pattern of history the Emergency is just one such piece. Dina Dalal also adopts a similar attitude of reconciliation with her fate and resignation to the will of God, while remaining cheerful and humane. Maneck Kohlah ends his youthful life upon railway tracks "glinting like the promise of life itself, stretching endlessly in both directions" (p. 611) like Time. His suicide is a symbol of hope in another life, a Beyond. He has Avinash's chess set in his hands and in his last thought, like the pawn with green felt on its base peeling, falling out and put back again in the

box by him. (p. 609). He too now falling out of this life hopes to be put back in the set by the great Chessmaster in the next life to play his unfinished return game with Avinash where his friend, already murdered during the Emergency, might be waiting for him. The game of chess will, in any case, go on and on, if not with his dead friend then with the other Avinash (the Indestructible, the Immortal). Time is eternal and death is not the end. The novelist is not a pessimist at heart and does not despair of life. In his general narration and with a somewhat ironical smile, he conveys his cheering message of a life and of passing our earthly existence with understanding, sharing beyond life, caring and loving. One life is just a tiny segment of a vast patchwork quilt of which the totality of design is known only to the Omniscient who holds the fine balance that sustains the universe, desiring that we maintain at least our own equipoise. It may also be a lesson from the victims of a tyranny to its perpetrators.

The novelist himself says, "Perhaps there are several messages in *A Fine Balance*"⁶, as also suggested in the multi-dimensional title of the novel itself — not only the transcendence of the tragedy of an ugly event like the Emergency, but also of the Present, in the vast ambience of Time and of its being subsumed in the fathomless depths of human personality which is itself a spark of the conflagration divine.

References

1. Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996). All page references to this book have been absorbed in the text of the paper by giving page numbers in parentheses.

2. Publisher's blurb on the jacket of the book.
3. 'How memory lives and dies' an Interview with Veena Gokhale, *The Times of India*, 27 Oct., 1996, 'Sunday Review', p.3.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Anthologized, for instance, in *One Act Plays of Today*, Fourth Series, Selected by J.W. Marriott, pub. by George G. Harrap, London, 1928.
6. 'How memory lives and dies', *Op.Cit.*

Others of Note

(i) **Balwant Gargi's *The Naked Triangle* : The Emergency as a Background**

Balwant Gargi's *The Naked Triangle* (1989) is, as the title indicates, a novel on 'the eternal triangle' in man-woman relationship – the unnamed narrator's happy wedded life with Jeannie, his having a tempestuous affair with Raji and Jeannie's growing attraction towards Christianity and towards the style of life in the West in which she was born and brought up and which she renounced for her love of India almost as much as for the narrator whom she married and came to the country of her enchantment. Now she quietly jilts the narrator and leaves with her two children for USA, leaving him completely broken but gradually reconciling herself to the situation and returning to his theatre-life.

The theme of this novel, of which the subtitle is 'An Autobiographical Novel', with events re-arranged, is, according to the author-cum-narrator-cum-protagonist, 'Betrayal'.¹ The Emergency is the backdrop against which this drama of human passions is played out. At the outset an attempt at mapping out the various significant features of the Emergency in the novel will be helpful in discovering the author-narrator's own political stance. He condemns the

widening between the rich and the poor leading to riots, strikes, etc.:

Leaders were arrested, press censorship imposed and strict security measures put into operation. Within a week, her powerful hand crushed the incipient rebellion. The entire police, military and services were behind her. The intellectuals, artists, painters and industrialists supported her. A new era began, an era of censorship, of suppression of views. The right of strike was withdrawn and all freedoms were cut down (p. 39).

But the novelist seems to defend Indira Gandhi's imposition of the Emergency to curb "growing lawlessness" (p. 39) to make her resign, neatly skipping over the court judgement which was the main cause for the demand of her resignation. His attitude towards the excesses in the Emergency seems to be ambiguous. While censuring press censorship and cutting down of the freedom she seems to suggest that all the organs of the government, members of various professions support the Emergency, though out of fear. As hinted by him, "some teachers were arrested and a few officials dismissed. The news was blacked out. Soon professors and intellectuals started saying that the emergency was a necessity, a social miracle" (p. 40). He also makes fun of Zail Singh's speeches and the "canned phrases and jargons" (pp. 40-41) repeated at conferences. In this and in respect of the brutal tortures he compares the Emergency with Marxists who "murder for an idea" (p. 72). Sanjay Gandhi and the fear instilled among the ministers, officials, the people who featured him, and politicians like Zail Singh who fawned upon him has been amusingly portrayed (pp. 106-107). Moreover, his practice of dealing out immediate justice on the spot "reminiscent of medieval courts" (p. 107), though satisfying the people, can result in gross miscarriage of

justice, as in the case of his ordering the arrest and punishment of the husband of a woman who later is found to be mad, for

“There is no enquiry. Just a report and the wheels of law start grinding. Now that poor English lecturer (the mad woman’s husband], who taught Shelley and Keats to his students, has been arrested. He is trying his best to prove his innocence. But no one is going to believe him” (p. 109).

The author-narrator does not hold a high opinion of women in general who exercise tyranny over men (p. 109) torturing their husbands to “slow death” (p. 109). The narrator naturally speaks bitterly about women after his betrayal by Jeannie and comments, “Women will always betray as long as they are passionate. The charm of their seduction lies in betrayal women who make declarations of love always have a lurking desire for treachery” (p. 166), and therefore “women should be used like toilet paper. Only then can a creative person survive”. (p. 167).

Such remarks are only the angered whimperings of a husband betrayed. But the example of the tyranny of woman over man, for which the latter is punished at the instance of Sanjay Gandhi are more a pointer towards the miscarriage of justice, instant and ruthless, and is a comment directed more at the Emergency and less at women. The author-narrator, however, has a different, if not contradictory, opinion about Indira Gandhi, her imposition of the Emergency and her ignominious defeat. She is sympathized with by the narrator everywhere. The court case, which made her declare the Emergency, has been, as we have already noticed, completely omitted. So are the razing down of houses by bulldozers and

the mindless sterilizations. She is focussed upon after her defeat in the elections, which according to the author was due to Sanjay whom she made her ears and eyes. She herself was hardly responsible for all the excesses, and she must have been shocked by her defeat:

It was the greatest irony of history that a woman who decided at a particular moment — whatever the reason — to lift emergency, order free elections, remove censorship and let the crushed, dis-spirited, tired opponents out of jail and create a free atmosphere should now be punished for that. (p.147)

He feels that it was:

The fury of man against woman. He has ruled for centuries. Corruption, cruelty, killing and murder are his prerogatives. He must command. Now by a change of history, a woman came to rule. How could he forget this insult? How could he ever forgive her? It's vendetta the revenge of the male species. (p.147)

The author decries the Shah Commission set up against him:

You set up commissions ... Ask retired judges to sift the most complex lies. And who helps the judges? The archangels of corruption, of falsehood. ... what's the guarantee that these very people will not turn up before the next commission and say that lied out of fear. The 'truth' becomes a 'lie' when the situation is reversed. (p.148)

Though *The Naked Triangle* is largely an autobiographical novel dealing with human passions and betrayals, it is set against the political ambience of the Emergency, perhaps a betrayal of the people of another kind, and while Sanjay Gandhi and the sycophants are portrayed as the real villains, Indira Gandhi is viewed in a halogen light

which hides as much as it reveals. She, a woman, is portrayed as a victim of betrayal, as the narrator is that of a woman. A balance has thus been struck in man-woman relationship, though the level of one is rather abstract and that of the other intimately personal. Yet the narrator's sympathy for one betrayed woman and his anger at another, who is the betrayer relates the political background to personal experience. The portrayal of certain aspects of the Emergency, though highly incomplete and partly subjective, balance each other. The narrator's anguish and anger in his own story are complemented by his sympathy and large-heartedness at the political level. In some respects, therefore, the author's attitude to the political background is a healthy corrective to the bitter consummation of the narrator's own love-life. The background of the Emergency thus becomes emotionally significant.

Reference

1. Balwant Gargi: *The Naked Triangle*, Vikas Publishers House, New Delhi (1989), Author's preparatory notes. References to all further quotations from the novel have been given in parentheses in the text of the paper.

(ii) Ranjit Lal's *The Crow Chronicles*: A Modern Fable

The Crow Chronicles (1996) has been perceptively called by Ruskin Bond “a pungent political satire”⁽¹⁾. Fable as a vehicle which highlights a truth, indirectly but sharply, retains the reader's interest by the use of animals suitably and allegorically. Many of the modern fictionists like David Garnett in *Lady into Fox* and R.K. Narayan in *A Tiger for Malgudi* have effectively used this form, not for didactic preaching, as Aesop had done, but to project some truth relevant to contemporary lives and times as in the ancient fable of Reynard The Fox or Chaucer's ‘Nun's Priest's Tale’. The nearest important parable in modern fiction that one can think of is Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Ranjit Lal's *The Crow Chronicles*² takes the bird sanctuary at Bharatpur, named as ‘Keoladeo National Park’ as the spring-board for his for his elaborate satire. Unlike *Animal Farm*, *The Crow Chronicles* gives a number of events and characters, which by populating a whole world of its own not only enrich the tale but also give it a semblance of reality, and its being wrapped in the huge paraphernalia of an imaginary world makes the satire more acceptable.

The novel called by the author a legend, is mainly located in Keola Deo Ghana National Park, which has been given all the paraphernalia of a modern democracy — a decorative Head, a weak Prime Minister with his cabinet rarely arriving at a consensus, an opposition of animals against the rule of birds, Army commanders, Director of C.B.I., Chief of Intelligence, Interrogators, guards of the Palace, etc. who are all given fanciful names not inappropriate

to their nature and duties. The Park is thus a democracy hobbling on, not without a mix of bureaucratic delays, corruption, bribery, mutual rivalries and quarrels. The scenario is somewhat similar to the Indian democracy before the Emergency.

As different from other democracies, this democracy does not produce a dictator from within: he comes from outside. He too is a bird, but an extra-ordinary one, as all dictators are from the common people. He is a formidable crow, all white from head to tail, with frightfully glaring eyes and powerful beak, ironically named Khatarnak Kala Kaloota Kawa Kaw Kaw. This Kaw Kaw has a strange fascination for jewels and ornaments and with the help of his devoted followers called crownies (a form of the modern 'cronies', which every worthwhile political leader has), he has garnered a huge treasure of highly valuable jewellery by stealing, and portions of which he uses for giving gifts or bribes.

The governing tale is set in motion when this extraordinarily resourceful crow with all his followers is able to settle down at the National Park on the pretext of doing social service. But Kaw Kaw is not made of the stuff of a social worker. Unlike Alvika, the protagonist of Raj Gill's *The Torch-Bearer*, already discussed, he wants to occupy the highest position of power without delay. His appearance too is distinctive:

Darkness always favoured Kaw. His plumage shimmered with a strange electric luminosity, every barb of every feather was etched in sharp detail, and the eyes pulsed like rubies that had come to life. (p. 125)

He feels that he was chosen to lead "so that crows may attain their rightful status in the universe! That is my mission

in life and that is why I am different. That is my identity." (p. 105)

After establishing himself and his devoted and trained followers, the 'crownies' (cronies) he soon stages what the novelist calls 'Kaw D' et at' (coup d'etat), and firmly seated in the Prime Minister's chair, he declares an Emergency and suspends all fundamental rights (pp. 239-40). After a bloody fight between his crownies and the animals, he strengthens his position. The members of the Opposition had already been arrested and the Press taken over. Kaw's Deputy, Craven Raven, takes over the editing of the newspaper "*Did-He-Do-It*" and all other newspaper establishments are sealed. The former Prime Minister has also been taken into 'protective custody'. In what follows there is the feel of Indian Emergency with the promise of fresh elections, not meant to be carried out, in this case "who needs elections! Democratic nonsense!" snorts Kaw (p. 288). From the premises of *Did-He-Do-It*, a new newspaper *The Kaloota Times* is going to be published (p. 286), while the now-taken-over *Did-He-Do-It* is clandestinely published from another place though it is being hunted down.

Many other aspects of the Emergency highlighted in the novel are arbitrary arrests and torture, forced confessions, cheering brigades (youth congress and other pre-Emergency student organizations arranging rallies and supplying cheerleaders) raising money for the personal benefit of their members, the attempt by Kaw to ensure hereditary succession by training his young offsprings to fly properly in a public gathering where they are declared by the people as koels and not crows.

The career of Kaw as a dictator ends with great dishonour ('Izzat Ka Faluda'), escaping execution and flying higher and higher to snow-clad mountains symbolizing his own colour and soaring ambition. The inverted standards of political morality in the Emergency are also expressed in Kaw's words, "No my friends, the time has come to set our own standards of what is good and what is bad, of what is right and what is wrong." (p. 285)

The white crow, regarding himself superior to all the birds and animals and so born to rule over them imposed an emergency establishing his totalitarian rule over the Park with the help of a few chosen advisors, the Intelligence and the Army, ruthlessly mowing down all opposition. The essence of the Emergency has been crystallized in this situation which also stands for totalitarian rules of all climes and times which are the creations of self-control, egoistic and ambitions individuals who regard themselves as distinctly superior to all the rest.

The novel is overlayed with other layers of suggestivity too – invasion, colonization and enslavement, the alteration in the composition of population by mass immigration, hypocrisy of leaders separating their actions from their words by a wide gulf, political spying and dark conspiracies, with the Emergency as its chief target, the novel is a fable of the seamy side of politics in general, the redeeming feature of which being the ultimate victory of right over wrong, freedom over tyranny, universal brotherhood over class-conflicts. But the germs of destructive evil present in every political system are hinted as being present in the ideal state of the Park in which the novel appears to end. Every paradise has a serpent and so the eternal conflict between good and evil in politics goes on. Out of the four

eggs fathered by Kaw, the white crow, that he leaves behind, one is likely to produce a bird of his own colour:

Three were ordinary blue-green crows' eggs with brown flecks. The fourth ... ah, but that is another story. (p. 459)

The Park may soon have another white crow, a progeny of Kaw, with what consequences one never can foretell. The game of politics is never finally over. *The Crow Chronicles*, sprouting from the seed of Indian Emergency of 1975-77 expands into a political fable of comprehensive and universal dimensions.

References

1. Back of the Cover of *The Crow Chronicles*.
2. Ranjit Lal, *The Crow Chronicles*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 126. All further page references to this novel have been absorbed in the text of the paper by giving page numbers in parentheses.
3. Ranjit Lal, 'A Note on the Chronicles' given in the novel, p. xi.

Non-English Indian Emergency Novel

The author tried his best to collect information about novels on the Emergency that might have been written in Indian regional languages except Hindi which happened to be his mother-tongue. He contacted all the scholars of regional languages in the various departments of many of these languages existing in Banaras Hindu University and a few scholars outside the University who all pleaded ignorance of any novel on this theme in their respective languages. He also wrote letters to Heads of Departments of all the important regional languages in all the major universities of the country but was not fortunate enough to receive any reply. In view of all the hectic efforts of the author bearing no fruit, he had reluctantly to conclude that no novel on the theme of the Emergency was written in any regional language of the country. Though surprising, it seems to be true that it was primarily the Indian English writers who voiced in fiction the strong resentment of the nation against the Emergency.

The conclusion was further justified by the fact that even in Hindi, the principal language of north India, the chief crucible of Indian politics, very few significant novels on or around this theme were written, out of which only one deserves some consideration. It is *Katraa Bi Aarzoo* (1978) by Rahi Masoom Raza, written almost immediately after the

lifting of the Emergency and the defeat of the Congress led by Indira Gandhi.

Katraa bi Aarzo (1978)¹ by Rahi Masoom Raza, beginning with the delineation of the lives and close friendly relations of the common people living in a locality named Katraa bi Arzoo and their ironical attitude towards politics and politicians. The Katraa, inhabited by members of both the major communities living almost like one family represents the country, while the protagonist aptly named Desh, is a typical Indian, first an admirer and then a pathetic victim of the Emergency, like a fly caught in a spider's web (p. 217). After delineating the various impressions and opinions of the people on the judgement of the court against Indira Gandhi (pp. 130 ff), the novel views the Emergency as affecting the lives of the people of the locality, and particularly Desh and his small family consisting of his wife Billo and their little daughter. Through their experiences various aspects of the seamy side of the Emergency have been forcefully delineated, some of them graphically – the dark, stinking and semi-opaque atmosphere of the Emergency settled upon them like a thick layer of fog (pp. 152-3), gagging of the press (p. 204), the blind functioning of the police (pp. 158 ff), forced and stupid sterilizations (pp. 197-200), rapes (pp. 206-9), rallies and processions in support of Indira Gandhi, inhuman tortures in jails, such as that of Desh (pp. 188 ff), suppression of the news of some deaths, the bulldozing of residential houses, even of the poor, like the dream-house of Desh and Billo and allotting them in their lieu non-existent houses and the heroic resistance offered by some individuals like Prema Narain, an A.I.R. news-reader who departs from the text to give the people the news of the torture of Desh by the police and herself suffers its dire consequences. The novel breathes the

plight of the common people – their helplessness, dumbness, and essential loneliness, with Indira Gandhi unconcerned at all this like her portrait smiling from a calendar (p. 213).

The climax of the horrors of the Emergency is highlighted in the pathetic end of the story of Desh and Billo, with the former becoming a cripple, both physically and mentally and only saying “Srimati Gandhi zindabad”, and ultimately being crushed to death under a truck, while his wife Billo voluntarily meets a similar fate by getting herself and her little daughter crushed under a bulldozer moving to raze down her cherished house. But soon destiny avenges their pathetic deaths, for the Congress candidate from that constituency is routed in the elections. The death-knell of the Emergency has been sounded echoing and re-echoing in the country, as if lulling the souls of sufferers like Desh and Billo to rest in peace. With its sensational and non-dramatic events, so well portrayed in the lives of the common people through transparent symbols and ironies, the novel is a powerful hammer to bludgeon the Emergency. But the very force and the directness of the ghastly events make them appear to be a little too contrived. Perhaps it would have been better if the writer, with such a fascinating theme of the interweaving with the Emergency the lives of the people of both major communities living in a small locality as one family, had left something to the imagination of the reader. But even as it is, *Katraa bi Aarzo* is the most direct and effective condemnation of the Emergency in Hindi fiction, Dr. Viveki Rai has rightly called it a bouquet of the cactus of Emergency. Two other novels in Hindi also deal with the theme of Emergency. One of them is Mudraraksha's *Shantibhang* which, without a regular plot, portrays the travails of the common man, especially caused by sterilisations during this

period. The other is Yadavendra Chandra Sharma's *Praja Ram*, which is a notable attempt to bring out both the good and the bad points of the Emergency through the mind of Praja Ram, a representative of the contemporary psyche.

Entirely different from these novels is Nirmal Verma's *Raat Ka Reporter*², the reality portrayed in which is not external but internal, through the unveiling of the mind of a journalist named Rishi. Its main thrust is towards the portrayal of a vague feeling of suffocation, suspicion, terror and void, which is universal in its dimensions and existential in its overtones. But these feelings arise from certain concrete aspects of reality and are not entirely figments of a diseased imagination. There are references to vague fears of the people in signing a petition to the government, the suspicion of being watched by intelligence people, the imposition of censorship on foreign journalists which include his German friend, the tell-tale marks of torture undergone by a senior journalist, the vague ringing of the phone in the night etc. In fact, a darkness, not necessarily evil but of the unknown, seems to envelop the protagonist wherever he goes, and he goes on sensing it while fulfilling his responsibilities towards his old mother, his wife, his beloved and his friend's wife. The novel, embodying the vague but strong pressures of the socio-political environment upon the soul of a journalist, may well have been conceived as an expression of a sensitive individual's response to the suffocating atmosphere of the Emergency.

Like Nirmal Verma's novel, Kamalleshwar's *Kaali Aandhi*³ is universal in its theme and its relevance to the Emergency. It consists only in the steep rise to power of a woman. In this respect it resembles Raj Gill's *The Torch-Bearer*. As in that novel, the woman-politician faces a deep contradiction between the demands of public life and the

cravings of her heart. In *The Torch-Bearer* the woman Prime Minister cannot bear the tension and ultimately her strength, bolstered up by the desire to avenge her treatment by society, gives way. In the case of *Kaali Aandhi*, the woman-politician feels fragmented between politics and domestic life. As she moves from success to greater success, she has not only to neglect but practically cut herself off from her husband and her daughter. The lid pressed over traditional wifely duties towards her husband Jaggi Babu and the affection for her little daughter Lily bursts occasionally, but it is kept tightly shut. The similarity of this novel to *The Torch-Bearer* consists in the dilemma of the woman-politician who is able to beat men at their own political manoeuvrings and reach dizzy heights of power. Both these novels have obviously been initially inspired by Indira Gandhi's rise to power, though they transcend the immediate into the universal and the external reality into an exploration of deep psychological dilemmas and emotional fragmentation of a woman-politician.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the Hindi novels on this theme are very few in number and, in fact, only one deals with the theme directly. But in spite of their small number these novels have shown a remarkable inter-relationship between public life and the individuals, which is indeed an important touchstone of a successful political novel.

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Summing Up

The story of Emergency is the story of about twenty months of the rule of the 'goddess' Indira Gandhi which, if it were benevolent and targeted towards the welfare of the community would have been accepted or even welcomed by the people, for the Indian psyche had, at least in the past, been oriented towards the glorification of one-man rule, like 'Ram Rajya', if it satisfied the above criteria. But the 'Empress' violated all norms of political decency from the very inception of the Emergency. She clung to the throne wrongfully and forcibly silenced all righteous opposition. And the dance of tyranny staged by her men alienated the public at large. The writer is the conscience-keeper of society and his pen, at the first possible opportunity, became the trumpet of the people. The goddess had failed, and the tragic tale of those twenty months became the subject of a large number of poems and stories. Not many approached the larger canvas of the novel, and those who did it mostly wrote in English. The fact that so many eminent Indian English novelists chose to focus on the Emergency either as the main theme, or as a part of the more comprehensive sweep, of one of their most significant works is a pointer to the fact that what they thought was of perennial importance which insisted on being expressed.

The phenomenon that the broad and demanding canvas of the novel was used mostly by writers in English and, except in a few cases in Hindi, is rather difficult to explain. It seems that writers in non-English languages were largely pre-occupied with their local or regional problems, that the period of the Emergency was so brief that it allowed

them time only to pen short stories or poems. And after it was lifted another disillusionment awaited them and the Emergency was soon replaced by other political issues. Moreover, perhaps the Indians are essentially too tolerant and large-hearted and the post-Emergency scenario was none too enthralling. The failed 'goddess' much more sober and dignified, was brought back to occupy the throne. The Emergency was for the masses a closed chapter. The problem of daily bread and butter again occupied their attention.

But it was not so for the intellectuals with an international outlook who reflected on what sort of period, however brief, the country had passed through. The novels on the totalitarian regimes of the West, became for them a further source of inspiration. Few of them had been personally affected by the Emergency, and so their approach to it was based on reflection, a cerebration that imaginatively fathered passion, assuming protean forms of pity, sympathy, condemnation, anger, irony and ridicule – to name only a few. The encompassing perspective as also the framework in which it was placed differed from writer to writer.

Some of them sought to squeeze, though only indirectly some lessons from it. Raj Gill conjures up an idealistic feminine icon rising from ashes and moving on laboriously to the throne, only craving for absolute power to defeat the corrupt and the opportunists and serve the nation to the best of her ability. But counting without the host, her feminine frailty, she dies overwhelmed by her own initial success, leaving the field clear for any such future incumbent. Manohar Malgonkar presents the horrifying spectre of an enemy, safe from public scrutiny by the screen of the Emergency, clandestinely creeping into a position of power and ready to betray, at an opportune moment, the nation

which is served by a few loyal and devoted officers of the government who unravel his real identity. But will the nation be saved again if another such situation comes about? It is a million-dollar question indirectly posed by the novelist. The Emergency is responsible for this danger to national security.

But, by and large, the Indian English novelists have presented the Emergency as a small fragment of a vast canvas of Time or Eternity. Salman Rushdie creates a twilight world presenting hilariously the endless cavalcade of mankind somehow hobbling along with an odd cocktail of pale optimism and mild 'sperectomy' (draining out of hope), good and bad inextricably woven together. Nayantara Sahgal, though realistically portraying the nasty and murderous politics of the Emergency, seeks a relief through escape into a broader historical vision of at least some aspects of the greatness of India's past. Shashi Throor manages ironically to pit the present against the mythological past, and, though admitting ambiguities of interpretation, points out their similarity and holds out the hope that ultimately 'Dharma', in its various facets will prevail, as it did in the past. O.V. Vijayan and Arun Joshi have a vision of eternity comprising a pendulum-like swing between good and evil – Vijayan admitting little hope of its ever being controlled for the biological reason of the gene of Evil being an inalienable part of the complexity of human personality; and Arun Joshi believing in the idea of the recurrence of 'pralaya' after every 'srishti' and vice versa till the right type of 'King' is incarnated to destroy evil and finally put an end to this recurrence. Rohinton Mistry, balanced in his approach, does not fight shy of delineating the excesses of the Emergency and the pathos of its turning two happy tailors into cripples through vasectomy and the tragedy of the life of Maneck

Kohlah leading to his suicide by jumping before a speeding train. But Mistry has the flint in him of making the two crippled tailors enjoy their pathetic existence and Maneek Kohlah notices that life is like railway tracks extending almost till infinity on both sides and committing suicide under the wheels of a speeding train with a chess-set in his hand hoping to complete the return game with Avinash in the life beyond death. Rahi Massom Raza holds out the welcome scenario of a nation with a secure anchor of goodness and tolerance and yet endangered by the Emergency ending on a note of unalloyed pathos, perhaps unconsciously nursing the hope that the resilience of the former will ultimately prevail over the latter. Ranjit Lal has vaguely pictures through an animal fable just a few facets of the Emergency in the arrival, rise and disappearance of a dictator, while Balwant Gargi just projects the Emergency as a contrasting background of the man-woman relationship in a certain family. These two novels, along with a few Hindi novels, fictional achievements in their own way, constitute just a fringe of the vast and solid achievement of the Indian Emergency novel.

Except the inexhaustible thematic variety of the Indian Emergency novel, there are other dimensions of it which can at best be pointed out in this study for fear of diffusing the focus. The Indian Emergency novels often seem to suggest some dystopic dimensions comparable occasionally to Western dystopias like Zamyatin's *We*, Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipalego*, Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, Kafka's *The Trial*, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-four* and Orwell's *Animal Farm*, to mention only a few. But we cannot pass over this observation without pointing out that while practically all the Western dystopias are negative – agonistic, nihilistic or

existentialist — Indian Emergency novel has by and large a positive approach the directions of which differ from writer to writer. Though different from their Western counterparts in the more significant aspects of themes and approaches to them, they, while lacking some of the finer sophistications of the Western fictional technique, have yet used a large number of their technical devices like meaningful multiplicity of narrators, appropriate flash-backs, clever alternation of telling and showing, use of three-dimensional characters, symbolism in both plot and character, subtle ironical and restrained pathos, unalloyed hilarity, sexual openness, and, above all, allegory. Perhaps the lists can be substantially lengthened out, but it is hardly necessary in the present study.

What is of meaningful centrality is that the Emergency and its treatment both bear the stamp of Indianness. The excesses of the Emergency are hardly a match for the innumerable, ruthless and blind, if not sadistic tortures portrayed in, say, Arther Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* or Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipalego*: they are modified by avoiding any senseless shootings and last for not more than twenty months at most.

Moreover, the Indian Emergency novels are parti-coloured, like Indira Gandhi's hair with plentiful streaks of white in it, with the whole being transcended by her powerful yet charming personality. This idea of the transcendence of the Emergency into something, nobler, vaster, higher is central to this fiction. Hence the form often used is allegorical, for in allegory, the apparent meaning is transcended into its real import. This idea of the world as illusion, transcended into reality, the serpent into the rope, is at the root of Indian thought, as it is at the root of the allegorical device. The Indian Emergency novel thus, by and

large, presents an allegorical spectrum in many shades of transcendence. These 'dystopias', therefore, often provoke not depression but reflections on problems like those of life and death, misery and true happiness and the incompleteness of this life. The phenomenon of so many Indian English novels and the absence of any novels on this theme in the other Indian languages to voice the feelings of the nation on the Emergency should finally lay the ghost, if not already laid, of the view of those critics who attained a degree of notoriety by attempting to propound the view that Indian writing in English does not express the authentic Indian sensibility.

The Indian Emergency full of suffering and evil, apparently having shades of dystopic dimensions, are basically fragments of the vast utopia of a divine configuration which transcends the limits of space and time. They appear to be but arcs of a perfect circle yet to be completed. This would perhaps be the appropriate philosophical approach to many of the Indian Emergency novels, which are in consonance with the approach, explicit or implicit, of their creators.

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Dr. O.P. Mathur, former Professor and Head, Dept. of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi is a devoted scholar who resigned from the Civil Service (Executive) to continue in the teaching profession. He is widely known in academic circles. His first book, *The Closet Drama of the Romantic Revival*, published from Salzburg (Austria) and later republished in Delhi, was very well received and got highly favourable reviews in distinguished journals like *The Year's Work in English Studies*, *The Byron Journal*, *Choice*, *Indian Book Chronicle*, *Literary Criterion*, etc. Prof. Mathur's other publications include reviews, interviews and papers in Indian, American, British and Australian journals. His other books are *Modern Indian English Fiction*, *Indian Political Novel and Other Essays*, *Sri Aurobindo: Critical Considerations* and *New Critical Approaches to Indian English Fiction*. The foreign countries visited by him include Australia, U.S.A., Canada, U.K. and Fiji. He was also the Local Secretary General Secretary and later Vice-Chairman of Indian Association for English Studies. He has also been unanimously chosen as the Conference President of the All-India English Teachers' Conference of 2003.

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